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LILIECRONA'S HOME

A NOVEL BY SELMA LAGERLÖF

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE. AUTHOR OF "GÖSTA BERLING," "JERUSALEM," "THE ADVENTURES OF NILS," "THE GIRL FROM THE MARSHCROFT," ETC. ETC.

TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH

BY

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Liliecrona's Home

CHAPTER I

THE STORM-WIND

ON Christmas Day, 1880, a pitiless storm raged over Lövsjö (Green Lake) District in Värmland. It seemed as though the heavens meant to tear up everything on earth and make a clean sweep of it all.

Now, do not say that no doubt there have been storms as bad both before and since, and, above all, do not let any of the Lövsjö dwellers hear you, for they have known from their earliest childhood that the like of this storm could never even be imagined.

They can still count up all the fences that were torn down, all the thatched roofs snatched off, all the cow-houses blown over, so that for days the poor beasts lay buried in the ruins. And they can point to all the places where fire broke out and was fanned by the wind until the whole village was in ashes. And they have been on all the heights and mountain-tops where tree after tree fell, until they stood naked and bare as they are to-day.

We know, indeed, the common proverb that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, but no one could believe that it was true of this Christmas storm, for, indeed, it was plainly to be seen that it only brought with it one misfortune after another.

And I fancy that the one least ready of all to believe that anything good could come from the storm was the "Little-Maid" from Koltorp. She was not to be trifled with, this little lass, as she stood that Christmas morning on the edge of the forest, and saw how the air in the valley beneath her was thick and dark with snow and dust and all that the wind was driving before it. Never in all her life, and she was thirteen past, had she met with such a disappointment. As a rule, she could keep up her spirits in toil and trouble, but this was almost more than she could bear. A very little more and the tears would start from the large bright eyes and trickle down over the pale thin little face.

Little-Maid had gone a little beyond the edge of the forest to see what the storm was like, and the wind tore at the handkerchief over her head, buffeted her short white sheepskin jacket, and whipped her homespun skirt so sharply round her legs that it nearly knocked her over.

She was not alone, her Mother and "Little-Lad" were there as well. Both were dressed like Little-Maid, in short white sheepskin jackets and skirts of stiff black homespun. Nor could it well be otherwise, for Little-Maid inherited her clothes from her Mother, and Little-Lad came into possession after her. But

there was this difference between them and Little-Maid that, although their clothes were just as warm as hers, they had not gone outside the forest, but still stood in its shelter.

The Mother and Little-Lad had just the same thin pinched faces as Little-Maid, and the same clever, bright eyes, and they too thought what a misfortune this storm was, and were not far off tears of disappointment either. But they did not look nearly so desperate as she did.

For you must know she was standing just on the high ground above Beckgorden in the Bro parish, and could follow the long twists and curves of the road leading down to Bro Church. And she saw how the peasant folk who had started to go to church turned back home again. This was all she needed to understand that it would be quite impossible for her Mother and the Little-Lad to walk twelve miles down to Nugord in the Svartsjö parish, where they had meant to eat their Christmas dinner.

She really couldn't help clenching her fist inside her glove when she realised it. If it had only not been so quiet in the forest, where they lived. If only they had known what the weather was like before they came to the edge of the trees. Then they would never have started from home, and that would have pleased her much better.

For, you see, there was nothing she felt so contemptible as to turn back, and not be able to go where she wanted.

If only she had not all the year reckoned on

this Christmas Day in Nugord! If only she had not seen before her eyes this minute the big steaming pans, the long tables with their white cloths, and the great dishes stacked high with wild geese. If only she and the Little-Lad had not said to each other whenever Mother had no food to give them: "When we go to Uncle's Christmas feast in Nugord we shall have as much as we can eat." Only to think that they were boiling sweet soup with raisins in it down there, that there was rice-porridge and cakes, jam, coffee, and pastry, and she was not to taste one of them!

She was so angry that she really wished she had someone there to vent her anger on. She thought to herself that the storm-wind might have known better than to come just then. It was a holiday, so he was not wanted to turn the mill, and winter, too, when no one wanted his help out on the lake, so he might just as well have taken a rest. But what was the good of telling a storm-wind that?

It was the worst piece of road that she had before her now—down past Helgesäter and up the Broby Hills right on to Löven and the church with the great Parsonage grounds—for the road there went across an open, treeless stretch of land. If they could only get over that and struggle up the Hedeby Hills, all the danger would be over, for, after that, it was nothing but forest.

It did not look so dreadfully far. She thought they might at least try, for at the worst they could but fail.

So she was glad whilst her Mother stood thinking, for it was always possible that she might decide to go on. But then she noticed that her Mother turned to go into the forest, and Little-Lad, of course, turned too.

Then Little-Maid began to go in the opposite direction, straight out on to the hill, at first very slowly, but then more and more quickly, for the wind came behind her and almost forced her to run.

She took good care not to look back for fear her Mother and Little-Lad should beckon to her to turn. She was almost sure they had stopped, and were calling to her, but that need not trouble her, for now that she was really out in the tempest there was such a din and racket that she could hear nothing clearly.

It was impossible for Mother to run and catch her up, for she had to keep hold of Little-Lad's hand to save him from being blown away, so that she could not get on quickly at all.

It was not that Little-Maid wanted to turn, for such a thought never entered her head, but she was obliged to confess to herself that she had never dreamt the weather was so bad as this. Over her head there flew great dark birds with fluttering wings that the wind was driving before it with such force that body and wings were swept asunder. She thought she had never seen anything so horrible, until she found out that they were great bundles of straw torn from some roof or other.

If she took a step against the wind, it rose

like a prancing horse and threatened to throw her down, while, if she took a step with it, it shot after her, so that she had to bend knees and back too to stand against its force. She grew so weary of the continual battle that she felt as if she had been dragging a heavy load.

From the north it came too, as cold as though it had been dancing with death, so strong and sharp that it pierced through sheepskin and homespun and laid its icy fingers on her skin. And although she did not heed such trifles, she felt her toes grow stiff inside her waxed boots and her fingers numb in the woollen gloves, whilst her ears tingled under her kerchief. But, heedless of all, on she went right down the long hill-side. When she reached the valley she stopped and waited for the others.

When at last they came in sight she went to meet them.

It would certainly, she said, be best to turn and go home again, it was quite impossible to get on to Nugord.

But now Mother was angry and Little-Lad as well. They said to themselves that this young lass was not going to order them about, and say when they were to go forward and when back.

"No," said Mother, "we are not going back to suit you. Since you are so anxious for your Christmas feast, you can just trudge on for it."

"Yes," said Little-Lad, "you can have wind enough blown into you to last you for many a week."

And with that Mother and Little-Lad began to walk on, leaving Little-Maid to come after as best she might.

When they came down to Uvgorden they met Gipsy-Lotta and Beggar-Jon. And these two who roamed about the district, week-day and Sunday, in fair and foul weather, put their hands to their mouths like a trumpet, and shouted to them to go home for any sake, or they would be frozen to death down by the cold lake-side.

Mother and Little-Lad went on, however. They were still angry with Little-Maid, and determined that she should feel right well what sort of weather it was.

They met Erik of Falla's horse coming along with an empty sledge behind him, for Erik's hat had blown off, and whilst he was running across fields, climbing over fences and creeping along ditches to catch it again, his horse had grown tired of standing in the wind, and trotted off home.

But Mother and Little-Lad looked as though there was nothing wonderful in that, and trudged on and on. Away they struggled, until they reached the top of Broby Hill. But then they came upon a great crowd of people standing with sledges and horses and unable to get on farther. For the great Broby pine, tall enough to be seen for miles around, had been blown down and lay across the road. And there stood Gullosa-Jan and Kringosa-Britta, who were to have been wedded that day in Bro Church. And there stood old Jan Jansa of Gullosa and

old Mother from Kringosa, friends and relatives, Player-Jons and beautiful Gunnar of Hogsjö, and many another who was going to the wedding.

They shouted and explained that twice before their road had been stopped by overblown trees. Those they had managed to move, but there was no doing anything with this one. And old Father from Gullosa went round offering brandy, but that didn't bring them on any farther. And the bride had got out of her sledge and stood there crying over the difficulties that had barred her way to church. And the wind tore the red muslin roses and green silk leaves from the edge of her dress, so that travellers who, later in the day, came through the parish, could think no other than that the storm-wind had found a wild rose bush in some fairy forest, and carried off its flowers and leaves to scatter them over ditch and field.

But Mother and Little-Lad did not stop for any pine tree across the road, but crept under and went steadily on. They considered that Little-Maid had not had enough of the storm by a long way yet. And just think ; they went on to the cross-roads and Broby inn.

There they met Madam Samzelius driving along in her covered sledge drawn by two horses. Then indeed they realised what the storm must be, when Madam Samzelius, who never heeded the weather, had a roof above her. She shook her fist at them as she cried, " Be off home, Marit of Koltorp. What are

you doing out with your young ones, when even I have to drive under cover ?"

But Mother and Little-Lad thought Little-Maid might still be the better of another buffet or two from the storm-wind.

When they came to the narrow sound between Upper and Middle Löven, they had to crawl on all fours the whole length of the bridge. For the wind was so terrible here that, if they had tried to walk across, they would have certainly been blown into the water below.

Once over the bridge they were half-way, and Little-Maid really began to think they would be at the Christmas feast. But no sooner had the thought come, than a fresh difficulty arose. The biting cold on the bridge had quite finished Little-Lad. He was like a lump of ice. He threw himself down on the ground and refused to stir another step. Mother snatched him up and ran off to the nearest cottage. Little-Maid was so terrified as she followed Mother into the cottage that she scarcely knew what she did. For if Little-Lad was frozen to death it was her fault. But for her, Mother and he would certainly have turned and gone home again.

They had come to a cottage belonging to people who were kindness itself. They said at once that it would never do for the strangers to leave them again until the wind had fallen a little, and added that it was the hand of God that had led them there. For if they had gone on to the Parsonage lands, they must most certainly have all three been frozen to death.

It seemed as though Mother too was glad to be under shelter. She sat there so contentedly, and looked as if she had quite forgotten that down in Nugord they were just busy turning the spits, and skimming the fat off the great pots of boiling meat.

When the cottage-folk were tired of saying what a good thing it was they had stopped there, they began to ask why they had gone out in such a tempest. Perhaps they had meant to go to church ?

Then Mother told them that they had wanted to go to Per Jansa's in Nugord. He was her brother-in-law, although he was as rich as her husband had been poor. Every Christmas he had a feast, and she—his sister-in-law—was of course invited. She had indeed thought it was terrible weather to go in, but this was the only festivity they ever had the chance of the whole year through.

The cottage-folk were troubled again when they heard that. It was indeed a pity that Mother could not get to Per Jansa's party, such a fine one as it was too. But there, it was quite impossible to go out again in the storm—it was only risking one's life.

Mother agreed that it was impossible, and looked as if she did not mind at all sitting in a poor cottage, when there were so many good things waiting for her somewhere else.

" If you hadn't the children with you," said the cottage-folk, " perhaps you could manage to struggle down there."

Mother agreed with that too. No doubt she

would have got to the feast, if she had not had the children with her. But she couldn't take them out again in such weather.

No; there was no help for it, they agreed. They thought it was such a pity, they said, and it was easy to see how sorry they really were.

Then all at once the good-wife had a very happy thought. "Look at that now," said she. "Why, of course, you can leave the children with us if you want to go."

How pleased they were, both husband and wife! They could not understand how they had not thought of it before.

At first Mother objected a little, but she soon gave way. It was agreed that the children should stay the whole day and over the night as well, but next morning Mother was to come back and fetch them.

Then Mother went, and there sat Little-Maid. Now there was indeed an end of her going to the Christmas dinner, that she saw.

But it would have been no use to say anything about wanting to go with Mother, for they had hit upon such kind folk that they would never have let her go away. And besides, they could not both have left Little-Lad either.

The cottage-folk tried to talk to her and cheer her up, but she could not answer a word. She turned her back to them and stood by the window looking at one or two birches swaying backwards and forwards in the storm. So many things she wished as she stood there. And one was that the tempest would take a real good

hold of the cottage and blow it down, so that she might get out.

But, but—— It began to look rather strange. Whilst she stood looking at the birches, she thought that every minute they seemed to sway less violently. The din and racket too, which had come with the storm, seemed less, and there were no more sticks and straws flying about. She scarcely knew if she dared believe her eyes, but now it was so quiet that really and truly the long hanging branches of the birches only quivered very little.

The cottage-folk sat chatting to Little-Lad, and never noticed anything until Little-Maid told them that the storm was at an end.

They were so astonished, and at once said what a pity it was it had not stopped sooner, so that the children could have gone to the Christmas feast. For it was no fun for children to be sitting there with them all day, that they could understand.

Then Little-Maid said that, if need be, she could take Little-Lad with her and go to Nugord. It was a plain road, so she could not miss the way, and there couldn't be any danger, either, in broad daylight.

They were really such kind folk! They wouldn't vex any living creature, so they let them go, both Little-Maid and Little-Lad.

Now everything was all right. The weather was fine and calm, it was easy walking, and there was no one to order Little-Maid to sit still, or turn back when she wanted to go on. Still, there was just one thing that made her uneasy.

The sun seemed to be sinking so quickly in the southern sky. She did not know what time it was, but fancy if it were so late that they were already sitting down to dinner in Nugord!

She still had six whole miles to walk. Just fancy if she only got there in time for empty saucepans and bare bones!

Little-Lad was only seven years old, so couldn't get along dreadfully quickly. He was tired, and dispirited too, after all he had gone through that day.

When they stood in the hollow at the foot of Hedeby Hill, Little-Maid stopped and looked at Löven which lay below covered with hard, shining ice.

She asked if Little-Lad remembered when Mother had come home and said that Löven was frozen. She had been so amazed that the lake was covered with ice before Christmas that she had talked of nothing else all evening. "Yes, that was two days before Christmas Eve," said Little-Lad. He was certain of that.

"Then it has been frozen four full days," answered Little-Maid. "I am sure and certain it is strong enough to bear us now."

Little-Lad plucked up heart again as soon as he understood that she was talking about going on the lake.

"We can slide all the way to Nugord," he screamed.

"Well, of course," said Little-Maid, "it would be quite handy to go that way, as Nugord lies on the bank."

She had her doubts too, but now it was Little-Lad who insisted. He wouldn't hear a word of the high road, and was for marching straight off to the lake.

"You must tell Mother you *would* do it," said Little-Maid, "for she is never cross with you."

It was not far down to the lake, and they were soon standing on the ice. They took hands and slid down Löven. That was better than trudging along the high road. In that fashion there wasn't much doubt that they would get to Nugord before the great Christmas dinner was finished.

But then Little-Maid heard a roar, and a rush behind her—a roar she recognised only too well. She didn't need to give even one look to know what it was when she felt it in the back of her neck—that terrible storm beginning once more.

It seemed as though it had only kept quiet just to tempt the children out on the ice. And now it came, took hold of them and threw them down.

When once the wind had begun again, it was utterly impossible for them to go on the lake. They could not even keep on their feet. There was nothing for it but to creep on to the land again.

Now indeed it looked as if Little-Maid were conquered at last. She had brought them to such a pass that it seemed very doubtful if they would ever see a human face again. They could not go on the lake, and when they

got to the land there was nothing but sheer mountain-side, and dense forest with never a path to be seen.

And Little-Lad was so tired and downhearted over everything that he could do nothing but cry. Little-Maid too for a time stood quite still on the shore with a crestfallen look on her face.

Soon, however, she remembered how she and Little-Lad used to coast down the hill-side at home, when it was covered with ice. So she began at once to break off pine branches and lay them together in two heaps. On one she set Little-Lad, and then knelt down and pushed him and the two pine heaps on to the ice again. When they got out where the wind was strongest she seated herself on the other heap, and she and Little-Lad each took a fine green bough in their hands and held them up against the wind.

"Hurrah!" said the storm-wind, "hurrah!" it shouted. Down it rushed upon them, and swung them to one side as if it wanted to see if it was as strong as they.

Then it got a good firm hold, and away they went—on and on like the wind itself. They never even felt its icy breath; they could almost have believed they were sitting still, if they had not seen the shores rushing past.

Little-Lad screamed with joy, but Little-Maid sat with set mouth watching if any fresh difficulty was going to come between her and the Christmas dinner. It was the quickest journey she had ever made, for it was but a few moments before they saw the great Nugord

houses rising before them on the shores of the bay.

The people of Nugord caught sight of them, just as they were going in to dinner, and they were obliged to run out and see what wonderful thing it was tearing down the lake. And no words can describe the amazement of Per Jansa, of Per Jansa's wife, of the Pastor and all the guests, when they saw them. The only person who did not look particularly astonished was Mother. "The lass doesn't give in before she gets her will," she said. "I have been expecting all the time to see her come flying along on a broom-handle."

But the others talked of nothing else all evening but the Little-Maid and of what a capable woman she would be.

Mother sat for a long time on the sofa beside the Pastor's wife telling all about her. She was not so bad at spinning, young as she was; she could card wool too, and all last summer she had picked berries and sold them in Helgesäter. Then the Captain's wife had given her an A B C book, and one of the young ladies of Helgesäter had helped her a little, so that now she could both read and write.

The Pastor of Svartsjö had been a widower for many years, but that summer he had married again. His new wife was a little body with quite white hair, but with a good complexion and an unwrinkled face. There was no one who dared to guess her age. She was reported to be a wonderful manager, and folks said too that she could tell at first sight what anyone was

capable of. Now this new wife told Mother that she had been thinking for some time of taking a young girl into the house to wait on her stepdaughter, so that the housemaid could get more time for weaving. She asked Mother if she would have any objection to letting Little-Maid come to the Parsonage next autumn.

Any objection indeed! What a question! Mother could not imagine any better fortune for Little-Maid than to go to service in Lövdala.

All evening the Pastor's wife sat and followed Little-Maid with her eyes. It seemed as though she could think of no one else.

After a time she beckoned to Mother again.

"Is it true," she asked, "that the child can read and write?"

Mother assured her that it was true enough.

"Well, then, we will arrange for her to come to the Parsonage at once," said the Pastor's wife. "You can pass Lövdala when you go home to-morrow from this Christmas feast, and leave her on your way."

And so it was arranged.

But the Pastor's wife still sat, after as before, looking at Little-Maid as though she could not keep her eyes off her. After a little she wanted to speak once more to Marit of Koltorp.

"What is your daughter's name?" she asked.

"Well, her name is Eleonora, but we always call her Nora."

"And it is really true that she can read and write—not just an idle boast?" said the Pastor's wife.

"No," Mother told her; "it is the honest truth."

"I have been thinking she might as well drive home with us in our sledge to-night," said the Pastor's wife. "We are just wanting a girl like her at Lövdala, so she may as well begin her work at once."

It was settled as the Pastor's wife wished, of course. She was not a woman that people cared to contradict.

CHAPTER II

THE SPINNING-WHEELS

THE tall old grandfather's clock which stood in the kitchen bedroom at Lövdala struck six with a rattle, as though the heavy weights were crashing into the nethermost depths, and woke Little-Maid, as she lay sleeping on three chairs, the insecure bed that had been hastily arranged for her late the night before.

She sprang out of bed with a scream, and rushed into the middle of the room. She had been dreaming that she was in her coffin, and was just going to be buried with the church bells tolling above her. But as her feet touched the cold floor she became at once fully awake. Supposing there was anyone in the room to hear how she had screamed? How the Parsonage maids would laugh if they found out she had been afraid of the clock. She did not understand why she had been frightened, for, although they had no clocks at Koltorp, yet in Nugord there were striking clocks both in the large sitting-room and in the little bedroom, so that it was no new sound to her.

It was not quite dark in the bedroom. A couple of small logs of wood were burning in

the stove in the far corner, so that she could see a little. No, there was no one else in the room. The narrow wooden couch where Mamsell Maia Lisa, the Pastor's daughter, had been lying when she came the night before, was not only empty, but made up for the day.

But if Mamsell Maia Lisa was up, it was high time she dressed too.

She put a piece of wood on the fire; if it would only burn up brightly enough to let her find her shoes, stockings, and other garments, she would soon be ready.

How strange it was to be here, dressing herself in the kitchen bedroom of the Parsonage, the very same Lövdala where her Mother had been nursemaid before she married Father. She wondered if she would ever love it as much as Mother had done.

There was no one in the world—except, of course, Little-Lad—whom Mother loved so dearly as the Pastor's daughter. She spoke of her as if she were a princess.

The Pastor's daughter was so beautiful that when she went out riding or driving people left their work and stood near the garden just to look at her.

The Pastor was a person of great importance in the parish, but he used to say that no one thought much of him in comparison with his daughter. He was an outsider, but she was one of the family who had been Pastors there for a hundred years, and it was she alone who would inherit Lövdala and the parish as well.

It had almost irritated Little-Maid to hear so much about the Pastor's daughter. It had almost seemed as though no one else was of any account where she was concerned. At any rate, it would be nice to have the chance of seeing her now.

If only she knew what the humming was that she heard as she dressed. Could it be yesterday's tempest still in her ears? or had the storm begun to rage again? Yet what she heard was not so much like wind as the steady hum of a mill.

At last she was dressed and opened the kitchen door.

No wonder it had hummed!

The whole kitchen was full of spinning-wheels and spinners—wheels and spinners, one behind the other until she could see no end to them.

She turned so dizzy that she had to stop a moment on the threshold. Three spinning-wheels going at once in a room were the most she had ever seen before. But however many were there here? She wondered if she would be able to count them.

It was so dark, too, in the kitchen that it was no easy matter to make things out. A few resinous, knotty pieces of juniper root were burning in an iron basket hanging from a tall iron pole rising from the hearth, and that was all. And not only the bad light made it difficult to see, but spinners and wheels alike were half hidden in the cloud of dust rising from their work.

Never, however, had she seen such a sight. As she stood looking upon the spinning-wheels with their treadles and spindles, and upon the busy hands and fingers, she grew more and more dizzy.

To master her thoughts she began to ask herself questions as her Mother had advised her.

"How many skeins of yarn are spun in this kitchen every single morning? And how many bundles of skeins are already hanging in the garret? And how many looms would have to be started in the spring to weave up all the yarn? And how many lengths of linen would have to be laid out afterwards to bleach? And how many——"

There now, the dizzy feeling had gone.

She could venture to step in now amongst the spinning-wheels.

There were not such a terrible number as she had thought at first, although there were not very few either. They stood in a long irregular line from the chimney, right away to the door.

Nearest the chimney and the glimmer of light sat the Pastor's wife, spinning fine white cotton on a wheel inlaid with yellow. Behind her sat someone whom she could guess was the old housekeeper that Mother used to talk about, with a spinning-wheel painted red and green. Beyond her sat five young girls—cook, housemaid, kitchenmaid, dairymaid, and brewhouse maid—all spinning fine linen yarn on ordinary, unpainted wheels. Still farther off sat a crofter-

woman, with a humpback, spinning light blue yarn on a poor old wheel. And farthest away of all, down by the kitchen door, in the cold draught from the passage, and in almost utter darkness, there was still one more spinner. She had a wheel with three of its spokes gone, the string was full of knots, the treadle out of order, and she was spinning coarse flax so rough and full of bits that anywhere else it would not have been thought worth using. But the spinner sitting there seemed to spin it as easily and quickly as the others their fine flax.

Who this might be Little-Maid could not imagine. Surely someone who had come to the Parsonage as a learner.

"You poor thing," she thought, "you have a bad time of it; you are evidently in the Pastor-wife's black books."

There were no more than these in the kitchen, and she couldn't imagine what had made her think there were such an endless number.

They all of them did nothing but spin and spin. Mother used to sing or tell tales whilst she worked, but not one of these ever opened her lips.

The Pastor's wife beckoned to Little-Maid. She was to hand her carded cotton out of a basket on the floor to save her having to stoop.

And this Little-Maid did for ever so long. The wheels hummed, treadles went, and spindles flew round. She began to grow dizzy once more, and was obliged to steady her brain again by asking the same useful questions.

"How many skeins of yarn can they spin here in a single morning? And how many bundles of skeins are already——"

But how was it she had not yet caught sight of the Pastor's daughter? Surely she would be sitting there spinning, as well as the Pastor's wife. But perhaps it was almost foolish to expect to find her spinning with the maids. She was too fine for that, of course, such a dainty little lady as she was.

Why, she was to inherit Lövdala and all the parish as well. No doubt she was sitting on the parlour sofa, embroidering flowers on a piece of silk.

Stay, what was wrong now? There was certainly someone doing what they shouldn't, for the Pastor's wife kept turning her head time after time towards the door.

Time had crept on now so far that it was getting light. The grey dawn came creeping in through the tiny window-panes.

Even right down the room, where Little-Maid was standing, she could see that the spinner sitting nearest the door had left off working. She was not asleep, but sitting with her hand on her wheel, gazing before her. But she did not seem to see what was passing in the room.

And certainly she did not know that the Pastor's wife had noticed that her spinning-wheel had stopped.

What a gentle, bright face that far-away spinner had, and what great serious blue eyes! She did not look as though she could have

stopped from idleness, but only because she was obliged to sit still and think.

But every moment that passed the Pastor's wife set her mouth harder and harder, until she looked so stern that Little-Maid felt afraid of her.

Now she stopped her wheel too, and stood up. And the other one still sat quiet and never noticed that the Pastor's wife was making her way between the spinning-wheels down to the door. She never stirred until the Pastor's wife stood over her and laid her hand on her neck. Then she uttered a little cry and tried to free herself, but the Pastor's wife had taken too firm a grasp of the little neck. With one hand she forced her back, and with the other she took the bundle of coarse flax from the distaff, pressed it on her face, and scrubbed it round and round.

"I suppose we are not all of us sitting here working for you!" she said roughly, in a harsh voice. "And there you sit and go to sleep."

Little-Maid all but cried out "Never, never!" Was that the Pastor's daughter? But it couldn't be anyone else that they were all working for.

The Pastor's wife gave her a last violent shake, threw the bundle of flax on the floor, and went back to her place.

But at the same moment the housekeeper and the five maids and the crofter-woman got up from their chairs and pushed aside their wheels.

The Pastor's wife turned to the housekeeper with an astonished look.

"I think," said the housekeeper, "that Madam knows that the maids are not required to spin whilst the Christmas holiday lasts, but it is the custom for us to have the time to ourselves and for our own work. And no doubt Madam knows too, that if we were to go and ask the Pastor, he would say we were to do as we have always done. We have been spinning all the morning because Mamsell Maia Lisa begged us to do as Madam wished; but now we stop, for we can see that whatever is done Madam treats her just as badly as ever."

When that was said, the housekeeper with all five maids and the crofter-woman picked up the spinning-wheels to carry them out of the kitchen.

But the Pastor's wife stepped quickly up to the door.

"Not a single spinning-wheel goes out of the kitchen with my consent," she said.

But the housekeeper went up to her without hesitation, for she felt she had right on her side. It looked as though something dreadful would happen in another minute.

But instead something quite unforeseen took place.

The Pastor's wife glanced round about, as though to see if anyone would help her. Her eyes fell on Little-Maid, and when she saw how the child stood staring at her in an agony of fear, as if she saw an evil spirit, she was transformed in a moment.

She went away from the door just as the housekeeper had come within a yard of it.

"Fair is fair," she said. "If, as Kaisa says, it is the custom for you to have a holiday at Christmas, you can have it this year too. But you might have explained civilly and not been so insolent."

"We can remember that next time," answered the housekeeper sullenly.

There was no time for more, for a little bell was heard ringing through the house.

"There's the Pastor ringing for morning prayers," said the housekeeper. "We must put away the spinning-wheels later."

They all went towards the hall door, but Little-Maid stood as if she could not stir. "How could it be the Pastor's daughter sitting away there by the door, spinning that coarse flax? It was a crying sin and shame. If only Mother knew of it!"

The maids tramped out in a long row, and the kitchen was empty, when the Pastor's daughter, who went last, turned and held out her hand.

"You must come to morning prayers too." What a gentle voice she had, and what a pretty, soft little hand! Little-Maid put hers in it, rather shyly at first, but as they walked across the hall she clasped her fingers tighter and tighter. When they reached the door to the Pastor's room the Pastor's daughter bent down to Little-Maid.

"I hear you are the daughter of Marit, my old nurse."

"Yes," said Little-Maid, "and I have come here to help you."

The Pastor's daughter smiled.

"Yes, little one," she said; "indeed I need someone badly enough to help me."

CHAPTER III

THE BLACK LAKE

ALL five maids were sitting with their thimbles on and needle and thread on the table beside them, mending old clothes. It was evident that, like tailors, they preferred a high seat for sewing, for all five of them were perched up on the high table-benches. Only the old housekeeper was sitting on a chair.

Little-Maid was standing at the window, looking out. Before her lay a great courtyard with cleared paths between high banks of snow. There were great buildings on all sides, and Little-Maid was trying from her mother's description to make out which was which. The long, low house exactly opposite the main building was, no doubt, the dairy; the stable lay to the east, and the brew-house with the room belonging to it on the west.

The houses were not built close to one another, but were separated by a fence, so that the only way to get to the main building was through a narrow gate left open now in winter-time. To the east of the stable she could see the gables and roofs of a number of buildings, standing round another and still larger courtyard. There was the sheep-house, the piggery, the larder,

and the storeroom, the lofts for rye and oats, the barns and wood-house, the servants' room, and the tool-sheds. Several of the buildings stood on piles, others had steps that twisted up the walls to the eaves, where they crept into a low garret. Wherever she looked, there were annexes and extra buildings, garrets with small, dark windows, and long, cold passages. Most of the houses had thick roofs of straw or turf, now covered with another of heaped-up snow. It seemed to Little-Maid as though they were all warmly tucked in under soft rugs and furs. A quiet peace reigned over everything as if the old houses were taking their winter sleep.

One of the maids was new and came, besides, from another parish. So she thought she would make use of this quiet hour to learn something about her master and mistress. She had asked question after question about the Pastor's daughter and wife as well as the Pastor himself, but never an answer had she got. All the others sat with tight-closed lips and pretended they knew nothing.

Possibly she noticed at last that she could get nothing out of them, for now she began to put other questions. "Why is this parish called Black Lake?" She could not understand how it got its name, for, although she had heard that there were three lakes in Löven, she knew none of them was called Black Lake.

Well, there was no harm in answering this question, but, unfortunately, none of the maids knew where the parish had got its name. So it seemed as though she was not going to get

this answered either. But then the old housekeeper put down her work and took her spectacles off her nose.

There was nothing strange in the name, for the parish was so called after a lake which used to be there but was dried up now.

The new maid was overjoyed at getting an answer at last, and hastened to ask whereabouts the lake had lain.

"Well, now, it is said to have lain in the valley below Lövdala," and the housekeeper turned and pointed out of the south window. She thought the water had reached the rising ground before the brew-house. At any rate there was fine sand there like the sand on a lake-side.

The new maid turned her head, too, towards the window. The dwelling-house lay on fairly high ground and the houses round were too low to shut out the view. Over the däiry fence she could see down a six-mile valley with a grassy bed as level as a floor.

But she would not believe that the housekeeper really meant this was the bed of an old lake. She had always thought the ground would be a steep hollow where a lake had once been.

The housekeeper did not contradict her. She did not trouble what the brew-house maid thought. She had only spoken of what she knew.

And with this she put her glasses on and began to sew again.

The new maid gave a scornful sniff. It was

a strange thing that old folk never could bear to be contradicted. They expected people to believe whatever they took a fancy to say.

None of the other maids said a word to help the housekeeper.

The kitchen grew quite silent. Little-Maid was very anxious to tell what she knew about this Black Lake, but she was not sure if it would be fitting for her to join in the conversation.

Then the bedroom door opened and Mamsell Maia Lisa came out into the kitchen.

At first she said nothing, but stood looking at the workers. Then she went up to Little-Maid, who still kept her place by the window.

"Tell me, Nora," she said, sitting down on the wooden chair under the window and taking Little-Maid's hand in both of hers, "have you ever travelled far enough to see any other lake but Löven?"

Little-Maid blushed crimson when the Pastor's daughter spoke to her. It was as much as ever she could do to speak above a whisper, when she answered that she had seen more lakes than she could count.

"Then do me the favour and think of one of them," said the Pastor's daughter; "whichever you like, provided it is long and narrow and lies between two long lines of wooded hills."

Little-Maid dropped her chin on her chest and fixed her eyes on the ground; but soon she looked up again. Now she had thought of one.

There was mischief in the glance the Pastor's daughter gave her, but her voice was terribly serious all the time.

"Do you see it quite plainly?" she asked. "Do you see a gay little river running into it from the north, and that it gets narrower and narrower towards the south until there is nothing left but another little stream?"

Yes, Little-Maid saw that.

"If you see so much, no doubt you see, too, how its shores go out and in, in long gulfs and bays. And that here and there narrow little headlands jut out, covered with birches overhanging the water. And small stony islands lie out in its channel, overgrown with mountain-ash and wild cherry trees that are as gay in their spring blossoms as any royal bride."

Yes, indeed, Little-Maid saw everything that the Pastor's daughter wanted her to see.

Mamsell Maia Lisa looked through the window down the long valley. Then she turned to Little-Maid smiling, but spoke with a tone in her voice as if she wanted her to remember her words.

"If you see so much, no doubt you see, too, that on one side there is a sandy shore, generally full of children who bathe the whole summer through, and at another spot there is a steep mountain-side where great dark pines grow with their thick roots intertwined like snakes. And farther on, the shore is marshy with alder bushes crowding upon each other, and farther away still there lie beautiful smooth meadows with cattle grazing in them."

Little-Maid was clever enough to see these too.

"If you see so much, no doubt you see, too, the great stones on the edge of the shore where people stand on Sundays to fish for perch," said the Pastor's daughter, "and the small oak rods lying in bundles on the land, and the little fisher huts standing old and grey out on the headlands."

"Yes," said Little-Maid; she saw that and more.

"Yes, if you see that, no doubt you see, too, that the whole lake is encircled by peasant houses with their fields and gardens, but they are not so close to the water as the fisher huts, but lie a good bit inland. Above these there lies a little forest clearing and a few birch woods, but then the mountain is covered far and wide with pine forests right up to the very top."

"Yes," Little-Maid saw that too.

Now the pastor's daughter grew thoughtful all at once.

"But now comes the hardest. If, one fine day, the lake that you have thought of should dry up so that not a drop of water was left, what do you think the place would look like where it had been?"

But that was beyond Little-Maid. She only fixed her eyes on the Pastor's daughter.

"I don't know exactly either," said the Pastor's daughter, "but I fancy that after some years grass would grow over the bed of the lake, and it would be enclosed, cultivated, divided, and marked out into gardens and roads

like any other land; but otherwise it would be much the same as before."

Little-Maid stood staring in front of her. She looked indeed quite lost.

"No doubt you have been in the hall at Helgesäter sometime, and seen the great gilt mirror hanging between the windows. The glass was broken this year and the Captain could not put a new one in, so he covered the back with green cloth. But the gilt frame remained the same. There was only this difference, that there was no longer a mirror inside it."

Little-Maid looked up quickly. She began to understand.

"So it was no doubt with the lake we have been talking about," said the Pastor's daughter. "Everything on the shore remained the same, although the clear water which used to lie in the middle had gone. The birches hung down their branches on the headlands, though they could no longer see their own reflection, the sandy shore lay in its old place, although no summer bathers came again, and the fishing stones were there too, although there were no more fishers. The little islands were still covered with mountain-ashes, although ploughed fields lay all around them, and all the houses kept their places round the lake, although the young folks who lived in them could no longer go sailing and rowing on the lake in the beautiful summer evenings."

Yes, Little-Maid could agree to that too.

But then the Pastor's daughter turned quickly to the window.

"Look out, Nora, and you others, too," she said, pointing to the long valley. "What do you think it is that you see down there?"

And sure enough, when Little-Maid peeped out, she saw in one glance all that the Pastor's daughter had described. There lay the level bed, and the old shores round it going out and in, in long gulfs and bays. There were the headlands with their birches, and in the fields the little copses that had been wooded islands before, and on one side the steep mountain with its pine forest, and on the other the crowded alder bushes. Half-way up the mountain she saw the circle of peasant cottages. And the wooded hills and clearings and everything else was there.

The maids stood behind her and they, too, looked and saw the same as she did.

However was it that they had never noticed it before?

It was certainly true that Black Lake had lain there once; it was the bed of an old lake sure enough.

"Yes, that is just what it is," said the Pastor's daughter. "That is the mirror which once lay before Lövdala, but it has lost its glass now. There are very many who think it is a pity that it is gone and that the mirror is a mirror no longer."

But now Little-Maid's heart was bursting with desire to say all she knew about the lake; she could not keep silence any longer.

"Mother used to talk about this lake that is said to have lain below Lövdala," she said.

" Yes," said the Pastor's daughter, " I expect you have heard a good deal about Lövdala from your Mother."

" Mother said," continued Little-Maid, speaking very fast, " that there were three things the lake left behind when it dried up. One was the cold breeze that always blows in the valley here, the second was the cold fog that rises in the autumn, and the third was——"

But Little-Maid never got to the third, for the Pastor's daughter interrupted her sharply.

" Just so, there was something else," she said. " We know what that was already."

CHAPTER IV

SNOW-WHITE

SUCH a chitter-chattering was going on in the kitchen bedroom at Lövdala that Little-Maid could not possibly get a wink of sleep, although she was lying that night in a real little bed which had been moved in for her.

Mamsell Maia Lisa's foster-sister, Anna Brogren, who had married Provost Lovstedt in Ransäter, had come on a visit and was to stay till next day. The spare room had been put ready for her, but no sooner had the Pastor and his wife gone to bed than she had come creeping downstairs again.

She had, of course, wanted to have a private talk with Mamsell Maia Lisa, and she was disappointed to see Little-Maid in bed there too. Time after time she went to look and listen if she was asleep. At last Little-Maid lay quiet as a mouse, for she was sorry to be in their way.

"She must be asleep by now," said the Provost's wife, as she took the candle and went once more to Little-Maid's bed.

"No, that she isn't," said the Pastor's daughter; "how can you expect it after all our chattering?"

"Perhaps we had better be quiet for a little," suggested Anna Brogren.

They had been silent not more than two minutes when Anna Brogren felt quite sure that the child would be asleep now, and a good thing too, for she was not going to leave Lövdala until she had heard how everything had happened, even though she had to sit all night long.

"She is not asleep, that I am certain of," answered the Pastor's daughter. "But we will manage another way. I will tell you a tale whilst we wait. I expect you remember of old many a tale of mine."

"I am afraid that's just the way to wake her up," objected Anna Brogren, "but do as you like. What tale is it to be?"

"I think I'll tell you the story of Snow-White."

"Oh, that one," said Anna in no very pleased tone. "It is a long time since I last heard that."

"You know there was once a Pastor's wife," began Maia Lisa, "who was so vexed that she had no children."

"No, no, you are telling it all wrong," said Anna Brogren. "It was surely a queen."

"I have always heard it was a Pastor's wife," answered Maia Lisa, "and I cannot tell the tale in any other way."

And she continued to tell of the Pastor's wife who had longed for a daughter, as red as blood and as white as snow, and who died when her wish was granted.

"I think we might talk about something a little more cheerful," said her foster-sister.

"I can understand that you have not forgotten the story," continued the Pastor's daughter, "and so I will not talk of little Snow-White's childhood. You will remember that it was free from sorrow, although she was motherless, for she had a kind aunt to look after her home, a kind foster-sister, and a dear old Grandmother. But the kindest and dearest of all was her dear Father. He was her gentlest playfellow, and to him she went in all her troubles. He never would have her kept strictly like other children, but she did just as she wished. People said of course that he was spoiling her, but he would not hear a word of it."

"Perhaps little Snow-White was too good to be spoilt," said Anna Brogren, in a strangely grave tone.

"Never anyone was happier than Snow-White," went on the Pastor's daughter, "especially when her aunt left and she had to manage the house herself and look after her dear Father. For many years her only sorrow was when her foster-sister married and moved to another parish. And if at that time anyone had told her that her Father would turn against her, I think she would only have laughed aloud. How could dear Father and she ever quarrel? Not even in her dreams could she imagine such madness."

"And certainly no one else either would have

believed it could happen," said Anna Brogren in the same serious tone as before.

"And Snow-White was never farther from thinking of such a great misfortune than one lovely morning last summer, when she went out with her Father to see the hay-crop."

"Was that last summer?" interrupted Anna Brogren. "I thought Snow-White lived a thousand years ago."

"I have always heard that Snow-White is still living," said the Pastor's daughter, "and the day she went out with her dear Father, she was just seventeen years old and he was fifty, although he scarcely looked it. He wore a peruke and no hat, his shirt-front was finely frilled, and great buckles shone on his shoes. In Snow-White's eyes he was very handsome, for she had on her old cotton frock and big sun-bonnet, and seemed of no importance beside her Father."

"I have always heard that nobody was so beautiful as little Snow-White," interrupted her foster-sister, but the Pastor's daughter went on without heeding her.

"The sun-bonnet, however, was very convenient, as it hid her face, for otherwise her dear Father, might have seen that she looked anything but pleased.

"Alas, alas! I am thinking why Snow-White was vexed at having to go out with her Father just then. She had wanted to stay at her loom and get on with her linen-weaving. But when he had come himself to the bedroom window to call her she could not possibly say 'no'."

"I do not believe she could ever say 'no' to dear Father," said her foster-sister.

"They went past the dairy and calf-pasture, for they were on their way to the south field where Long-Bengt and the Vetter-lads were busy mowing grass. It was not far, but it always meant plenty of time to go out with her Father.

"He stopped to look at the cows and he stopped to talk to the dairy-maid. When they came to the birches on the hill, he stopped again to prop up a young fir tree that had been blown down.

"But now I must tell you that Snow-White could never be cross very long when she was with dear Father. She was always so full of wonder that he was just what he was.

"And, in my opinion, Snow-White was not wrong in thinking it noble and kind of Father to stay all his life as assistant-pastor in a poor little far-away parish of far-away Värmland. With his learning and irresistible eloquence, added to his dignity and charm of manner, he could surely have become a dean or a bishop if he had only been willing. Don't you think so, too?"

"It is not easy for me to say anything about Snow-White's Father," said Anna Brogren. "But I should certainly think he could have risen to any post he wished."

"I cannot be certain of Snow-White's feelings, but I fancy she said to herself, 'You, Snow-White, who know nothing, who are nothing, and who have seen nothing, are you not ashamed

to go about in a bad temper? Just think of Father who never complains, never wants anything for himself, and always carries a bright face!' Snow-White made excuse that she would so have liked to finish her weaving before she left home. For she had no choice but to go that summer to Loka Wells with her Grandmother. Last winter had plagued her terribly; it broke one's heart to see how her hands suffered. All spring, Snow-White had urged her to go for a change, but she knew her Grandmother would never go without her.

"She knew she ought to ask her Father to fix a day for their journey. But she shrank from doing it. Did she not know that dear Father was sorry to lose her for six whole weeks, and put it off as long as he could?

"So she walked along making conditions with herself: if there was a fine hay-crop on the south field, so that Father was really pleased, then she would pluck up courage and speak about the journey.

"And it really looked as if she would soon have to go, for when they reached the south field the crop was an uncommonly fine one. Snow-White at once noticed how pleased dear Father was, for he began to joke with Long-Bengt, the tallest man in the parish, and say he ought to grow a little more. The grass was taller than he.

"Long-Bengt was at no loss for an answer. He said that if the Pastor was going to keep on working his land in that way, he would soon get no one to mow his grass. It was a misery

to have to cut through such a wall. And the two Vetter-lads backed him up and said they would rather fight with all the West Goths in Broby fair than mow grass like that another year.

" Dear Father had to give as polite an answer back again, and they all stood round in silence, waiting for it.

" Ah, I think Snow-White will always remember Father as he stood there, so pleased and friendly in the midst of his men, pretending that he was wondering what he could answer so that it might make the better impression when it came.

" But look at that now ! They never heard dear Father's answer, for something unexpected happened and turned their thoughts in another direction.

" Whatever could it be coming towards them through the high grass ? What could it be, not walking quietly, but reeling along, screaming and talking to itself ?

" I am sure Snow-White had never seen anything that moved her so deeply.

" Ah, to see a woman in such a dreadful state ! Her clothes wet and muddy clung tightly round her. Her hair had fallen loose from the comb and hung in wisps down her back, and, most terrible of all, there were bloodstains on both hands and face.

" Long-Bengt and the Vetter-lads turned aside and spat three times as though they had seen an evil spirit. A very little more and dear Father would have done the same.

" But suddenly Snow-White seemed to recognise the new-comer's face, and she hastened to whisper to dear Father that it must be the lady who kept house for Countess Borg.

" Father agreed, and went up to the lady and asked her what had happened that she was coming to him so early in the morning. But she was so excited that she did not know him, but only called out that she could bear it no longer at the Countess's, and was on her way to get help at the Parsonage.

" They took her home with them, and after a time she grew calm enough to tell them what had happened.

" The Countess had worried and plagued her until she could bear it no longer, and had run away from Borg at two o'clock in the morning.

" She had been so confused that she never thought where she was going until she was out of the house. Then she had decided to go to the Parsonage as she had heard they had kind hearts there. But the poor thing had taken a short cut over the meadows, could not get over the footbridge, but had tumbled into the brook, hit her head and destroyed her clothes. This had so upset her that she could not find the right road, but had wandered to and fro the whole morning over the pastures and cornfields.

" Now she asked so nicely for leave to stay at the Parsonage until she had dried her clothes, washed away the bloodstains, and thought a little what she should do next.

"Of course she could do that. Ah, I wonder who would have refused any human being in such distress!

"But how Snow-White and her Father blamed the Countess. Beautiful and gay as she was and yet to be so cruel to those beneath her! And it wasn't the first time either that they had heard a like tale of her. I can tell you it was a good thing the Countess didn't meet Snow-White that day. She would have asked her if she wasn't ashamed of herself. This lady—now what shall I call her?"

"You can call her Mamsell Vabitz," suggested her foster-sister.

"Well, this Mamsell Vabitz was such an excellent person and so well spoken of, that the Countess ought to have known better than to frighten her out of her wits.

"But that very same day Snow-White hit upon a plan which gave her great pleasure. She would ask Mamsell Vabitz to stay and keep house at the Parsonage whilst Grandmother and she went away for their change. If only that could be arranged, she would be sure that everything would be just as comfortable as if she were at home herself."

"But, dear heart," said her foster-sister, "was that your idea? I mean was it Snow-White's?"

"Yes, indeed it was hers and no one else's, and she was so glad that she had had such a happy thought. She asked Mamsell at once if she would stay, and she answered without hesitation that she would be glad to do her that

service. But, she added, that she would like to say if she could get a post in a gentleman's house, she should leave at once. She was a poor woman and had to put her own interests first.

"But it was not so easy to persuade dear Father. Was he to have Mamsell going about the house for six whole weeks and be compelled to sit at meals with her?

"You have no idea what a business it was before Snow-White and her Grandmother were successful. Father and Mamsell Vabitz couldn't get on at all well together. He liked to joke and tease everybody, but Mamsell was strait-laced and serious and very mindful of her dignity.

"Snow-White generally managed to keep them apart until meal-times, but no sooner had Father sat down to table than he chose for his subject whatever he thought would tease Mamsell. Best of all he liked the talk to be about love and marriage.

"'He was so glad,' he said, 'to have Mamsell in his house to give him good advice. He had long been thinking of marrying again. What would she say to Countess Borg?'

"But no sooner were the words said than Mamsell grew stiff with horror. She laid down her knife and fork on her plate and stared at him."

Anna Brogren began to smile. "How he would enjoy that," she said.

"Yes, dear Father was plainly in his element then. It was not every day he found anyone

who did not understand his jokes. Now he declared he really could not comprehend why Mamsell should look so astonished. Did she think that the Countess would not have him? But he knew for a fact that the Countess thought him a handsome man. She always came to church every Sunday when she was at Borg, and she had told him with her own lips that she never went to hear an ugly preacher.

"It was really too funny! When Snow-White's Father said this two bright red spots appeared on Mamsell's cheeks. She had evidently been silent as long as she possibly could, but now she had to give vent to her anger. 'And this man is supposed to be a Pastor and servant of God,' she burst out.

"And Mamsell had such a coarse, rough voice. She was a little woman with a small, refined face and snow-white hair, although she was not more than forty years old. She looked as gentle as a dove, and for that very reason it was more of a shock when she began to speak.

"Now when Mamsell had in her deep, hollow voice pronounced judgment on dear Father, he began to laugh aloud. But not another word did she utter all dinner-time."

Anna Brogren began to laugh too, but Snow-White only sighed before she went on.

"I expect I need scarcely say how Snow-White begged and prayed her Father and how really distressed she was when her entreaties were of no avail. She lived in continual anxiety lest

Mamsell should run away from them as she had run away from Borg."

"I rather fancy she stayed," said her foster-sister.

"Yes, she stayed, and how glad Snow-White was. Mamsell even began to help in the housekeeping. She would not stay with them and do nothing, it wasn't likely she should.

"Of course such a cook as Mamsell was not content with ordinary middle-class fare, but she made French dishes as if for a nobleman's table. And dear Father, who for several years had been tutor in good families, lived his young days over again, when he tasted made dishes, fine pastry, and spicy sauces. It was plain he would not go short whilst Snow-White was away. It was reassuring, too, to notice that his jokes with Mamsell lost a good deal of their sharpness when she had served a really good meal.

"And it was pleasant, too, that he and Mamsell both took such an interest in gardening. He might talk as long as he liked of the botanists, Linne and Hammarby, and of the Botanical Gardens in Upsala, without Mamsell's ever being tired of listening to him.

"Ah, no doubt it was the gardening that reconciled Father to the thought of keeping Mamsell. Otherwise he would never have done it. Snow-White had that to thank for her ease of mind when she started. She almost dared to hope that Mamsell Vabitz and dear Father would put up with one another till she came home again.

"But she was not really happy all the time she was away, for her thoughts were always at home, wondering if Father was teasing poor Mamsell.

"When Snow-White had been away two weeks, dear Father wrote her such a gay letter, full of fun from beginning to end, telling how he and Mamsell were getting on. One evening he had had a visit from Lieutenant Christian Berg and Herr Julius, and they had all played cards and sung Bellman. Next day Mamsell would not speak to him, and all the week he had had nothing for dinner but black puddings and bacon or carrots and salted herrings. But the day before he wrote, he had had grilled salmon and game pie, so that he knew he had been taken into favour again.

"Snow-White could not help laughing at dear Father's nonsense, although that letter did not altogether reassure her. But the next was better, when he told how Long-Bengt had given out that he was now going to marry Merry Maia, his old sweetheart, and that Mamsell Vabitz had been the means of persuading him. She had kept on telling him how wrong it was to keep a woman waiting fourteen years, and at last her words had taken effect.

"It was plain that dear Father was very pleased. He did not write 'Vabitza' in this letter as he usually did, but Mamsell Vabitz—a sure sign that he recognised what an excellent person he had to do with. After that Snow-White got no more letters from dear Father,

but only short cards to say that he was too busy to have much time for writing. Not one word did he say of Mamsell, which must mean that he had got used to her and thought no more about her than about the other servants.

"But Snow-White still felt a little uneasy, and I cannot describe how glad she was when she got into the carriage to drive home. She had written in good time to tell him when to expect them, and in the same letter had praised him for putting up with Vabitz. But now he need not have any more strangers in his home, for Snow-White would never leave him again."

"Did she really write that?" asked her foster-sister; "she must be amused now to remember it."

"There is a good deal that is amusing in this story," said the Pastor's daughter. "It is almost laughable to think how pleased Snow-White was as she drove along the road, so happy indeed, that all she met brightened up at the very sight of her. At least it was so at the beginning of her journey, but when she came nearer home, where people, even at a distance, recognised the carriage and its occupants, she thought that everyone they met was thinking of something sad enough to make their faces drawn and wrinkled.

"I tell you Snow-White grew quite puzzled. When she came to the last inns where she knew the innkeepers, she asked after dear Father, and they told her he was as active as when she

went away. Yet she could hear by their tone that they knew something they would not tell. Neither would she ask. It was indeed rather sad if Mamsell had run away at last, but Snow-White was not going to spoil the joy of her home-coming by thinking about her."

"That is ridiculous beyond words," said her foster-sister, with a laugh, "if it were not so sad."

"At the last stage Long-Bengt came to meet them with their own horses. And there was no doubt about it, he was strange, too. As a rule words had to be literally dragged from him, but now they came in an endless stream. And Snow-White noticed, too, that he talked about everything else, but not a word of her Father and Vabitz. And she dared not ask. If anything was wrong she would, no doubt, hear it from dear Father himself."

"And so she knew nothing before she got home?" exclaimed her foster-sister.

"No, she knew nothing—nothing at all. And I will tell you what was the saddest part of it all for her, and that was that dear Father thought he had acted with such wonderful prudence, and expected her to be pleased at what he had done. And no wonder he did. For had she not praised Mamsell and said he ought to be happy to have such an excellent person in his house? It was her own words perhaps that had led him to think that Mamsell——

"You certainly can never understand how pleased Father was, as he stood upon his

threshold to welcome her, and how pleased Vabitz was as she stood beside him. Dear Father's only wish was to tell the great news.

" But he did not need to tell anything, for she saw it herself, knew it indeed before she got out of the carriage. And now I must tell you how upset she was. She grew so angry that she lost all self-control. Never in her life had she felt like that before. She did not indeed fly at them with cuffs and blows, much as she would have liked to do it.

" Her tongue, however, she could not control, and she said the very worst she could think of. Never would she call Vabitz ' Mother ' was her first speech, and the second that she was no fitting wife for her Father, she who was but the daughter of a poor German trumpeter, whilst her Father could have married the best-born lady in the land. And, she continued, they knew well enough themselves that they had acted wrongly or they would never have married on the sly.

" But now Grandmother came, seized her wrist, and told her sternly to come with her to her room. She did not refuse to obey, but first she turned to Vabitz once more and told her she had curried favour with Father by her good food, and that he had only married her for her fine dishes.

" And when that was said her Grandmother got her away."

" That was a pity," said her foster-sister ; " I think they might have let her go on."

"No, her Grandmother carried her off, and once in her room she burst into tears. That, too, was something new, for never before had she cried like that. On and on she wept for hours before she stopped, and all the time she felt as if something which hitherto had lain asleep within her heart had now awakened and overmastered her.

"She felt convinced that some old dragon or horrible wild beast had its home in her soul. Alas, alas, in her fear of this she almost forgot the other grief, for indeed it was a sore trouble to know there was anything so unruly and dangerous in her very self! It was true she could not exactly help its being there, only she must never again let it be seen."

"Oh, dear heart," said her foster-sister tenderly, "had she never been angry before in her life?"

"At last she slept and forgot it all, and did not wake until next day as the sun was rising from behind the mountain and shining in her face. She lay, feeling miserable, and wondering what she should do. But she did not need to wonder long, for in a few minutes the housemaid came with a message from her mistress; she was to get up and go to her loom.

"It still wanted some minutes to four, and she had not been in the habit of getting up so early. And, although she had worked, it had only been at her own wish, not at another's bidding. She was getting angry again when she remembered the wild creature inside and feared lest it should lift its head again.

" When she had been working at her loom a couple of hours, she could better understand how everything had happened. Vabitz had not tried to curry favour with dear Father, but had kept on telling him the truth, until he had plainly seen that she would be an invaluable help for him and his daughter. And when dear Father had seen that his daughter had not appreciated his cleverness, he was, no doubt, quite angry with her.

" At seven o'clock Snow-White was called into her Father's room to be warned and scolded, as indeed was to be expected. But he was so terribly tactless, when he reproved her, that she nearly grew angry again. Still she did not, but begged both Vabitz and dear Father very sweetly for forgiveness as she kissed their hands. She could see how he rejoiced to have it settled and peace in his home once more."

" And things like that can happen whilst someone else, but a few miles away, knows nothing of them," exclaimed her foster-sister, with a tearful voice. " If only I had been there."

" It was a good thing there was nobody there to take Snow-White's part," said the Pastor's daughter. " She was glad she had been ready to make peace, for when she saw them together she understood that she was not the most unhappy.

" She was young and might get married and have a home of her own, but it was another matter with dear Father. He would never

be rid of Vabitz, but must keep her to his life's end.

"That indeed was a life in mid-winter with never a summer sun. It was not she but dear Father who was to be pitied.

"But, friendly as she wished to be, she could not help being vexed with him, when he came in a little while to her bedroom window, and asked if she would not come out for a walk. She replied that she could not possibly, for dear Mother had ordered so many yards to be woven before breakfast.

"In the first moment of irritation dear Father insisted she should come in any case, but then he bethought himself that it would scarcely do to set dear Mother's orders on one side the very first day. So dear Father went away from the window and left Snow-White at her loom. This she had never expected, and her heart was ready to burst. She knew she had lost dear Father."

Her voice shook with sobs and she stopped short. Anna Brogren, too, did not speak, but wept aloud.

And Little-Maid would have cried, too, if she had not been so afraid that the others would hear her.

The next night was not a scrap better for Little-Maid than the last. Anna Brogren had not gone as she intended, but had put off her journey home, and no sooner had the Pastor and his wife said good night than down she crept from the guest-chamber into the kitchen bedroom to talk to her foster-sister.

This time they did not trouble about waiting until Little-Maid was asleep. Anna said at once that she had only stayed to hear the end of the pretty tale that Maia Lisa had begun the night before. And she begged her to go on at once so that they might finish it, for she could not possibly stay over the next day.

And so the Pastor's daughter began again.

"If I remember right," said she, "Snow-White had not been at home more than a week before Sexton Moreus with his wife Ulla came on a visit. I cannot tell how pleased she was when they came. Everything was going smoothly between dear Mother and her, it is true, but how she had to work! She sat all day long weaving her diaper patterns until at night she went to bed with an aching back. It was a mercy when a visitor came to give her a moment's leisure.

"Ah, dear, dear! Snow-White thought to herself that she would certainly never get dear Mother's love of work, nor would she ever get such quick and clever fingers. Mother could weave a beautiful damask with all the animals out of the Ark worked into the border. Snow-White saw plainly enough that Mother looked upon her as a bungler, but she thought she surely must see, too, that she tried her best to please her.

"Ulla Moreus knew dear Mother from the time when she was housekeeper at Borg and understood her well. Besides, she had lately been with her mother-in-law to help at Borg with the autumn baking, so she had plenty

to tell about the Countess. Snow-White noticed that dear Mother enjoyed hearing of all the mad things her ladyship had been doing lately.

"But to tell the truth, I think no one was so pleased at the visit as dear Father. Snow-White sat and watched how he threw off the great dignity he had assumed ever since his marriage, and became his old self once more. And she said to herself, 'I cannot think how dear Father has held out lately. I have not known him since we went to the south field to see the hay-crop.'

"Snow-White knew so well that it was on her account that dear Father no longer dared to laugh or joke. He was filled with remorse that he had brought her up so badly. For he thought that she would never have broken out as she did against him and dear Mother if he had not spoilt her. But Father had made up his mind now that she should be kept in check, and had it so upon his conscience that he never dared be anything but stern and serious when she was in the room.

"Only a few months ago her Father had thought she was everything she should be, but now she was good for nothing. He would certainly never be himself again until she was a changed character.

"But when Sexton Moreus came, Father forgot his heavy burden and was just as of old. She could not help thinking that dear Father must love her very dearly. What restraint he laid upon himself every day for her sake.

She was surely not so grateful to him as she ought to be!

"Dear Mother wanted to see to supper herself to show Ulla Moreus that they had never had such food in Lövdala as now. She knew that Ulla was the cleverest cook in the parish and continually went to prepare wedding and funeral feasts, so that it was worth while to make a show for her. And whilst dear Mother stood over the kitchen stove Ulla proposed that Snow-White should go down with her to Grandmother's for a little.

"In Grandmother's room Ulla undid a parcel that she had brought with her to amuse them. It was such a handsome present that she had got from her ladyship the Countess. How they laughed as Ulla told how high she stood in the Countess's favour and what beautiful presents she got from her. Once she gave Ulla a lapdog which could only be fed on cream. That indeed was a generous gift to a poor Sexton's wife who by no means always had a cow to milk.

"I fancy Ulla would have been almost sorry if the Countess had ever given her anything that was any good. How gay she was as she unpacked the last present.

"'Look at that now,' she said; 'see how well provided I shall be when I drive off to peasant houses to get the wedding-feast ready.'

"The Countess thought, no doubt, that she had robbed herself when she gave Ulla her riding-dress—the English one that she had

worn herself the last few years, with a black cloth habit, a tight-fitting red coat, and a small top-hat. It was of beautiful stuff and certainly not worn out, but quite ridiculous all the same. It was of such a length that Ulla could not take a step in it, and it was ludicrous beyond words to see her in the red jacket. Ulla wanted Snow-White to try it on too, and when she did both Ulla and Grandmother Beata were quite delighted. 'There now,' said Ulla, 'what a pity the grand present didn't come to you; it fits as though it were made for you.'

"Ulla put her in front of the looking-glass, puffed out her hair a little and put on the hat.

"'Look at her,' she said to Grandmother. 'Isn't she like a little noble Countess? Have you ever seen her look so sweet?'

"Ulla wouldn't hear of her taking off the riding-dress until dear Father and Sexton Moreus had seen her in it.

"I must just say one thing. Snow-White never ought to have dressed up. She entered into it so heartily and at once thought she was someone else.

"Grandmother and Ulla bent double with laughter when she began to walk and talk like her ladyship the Countess. And Ulla again repeated that she would never forgive her if her husband did not see her, and insisted that they should go back to the house.

"Snow-White thought to herself, 'Perhaps dear Father may not like me to dress up when he is so strict with me. Before I might do it

as often as I liked, but everything is different now.'

" But as Ulla was with her she took heart and encouraged herself by thinking, 'It will never do to let yourself be quite cowed. Dear Father is himself again to-day and he cannot find any fault with your putting on theCountess's dress.'

" Another thought too gave her a little comfort. She believed dear Mother would not at all object to their having a little joke about her ladyship.

" When they were out on the stairway Ulla Moreus had a fresh idea. She took Snow-White away to the stable and then persuaded Long-Bengt to saddle Blackie. Blackie was small and stumpy, not much like the high riding-horses in Borg, nor was the saddle with its great stuffed seat and high wooden back very similar to the one her ladyship used.

" When Blackie was ready with Snow-White on his back, Ulla ran on and called into both kitchen and drawing-room that Countess Marta was riding down the Avenue.

" Oh, oh, what a commotion there was! Dear Mother tore off her apron so that her cuff came with it, and rushed out to the porch; dear Father sprang out, too, with his wig all on one side and stood by her side on the top step; Ulla and Sexton Moreus took their place behind them, whilst the housemaid stood curtseying on the lowest step.

" Snow-White had her riding-whip, of course, and touched up Blackie, but it was impossible

to rouse him out of his jog-trot. Not that that troubled her, for she never dreamt but that her Father and Mother would recognise her at once.

" But it was too ridiculous !

" Mother had so constantly seen the red riding-habit that the Countess had worn for several years that she noticed nothing else. And no sooner had Snow-White saluted with her riding-whip and called out ' Bonjour, Monsieur le Pasteur,' just as the Countess used to do, than dear Mother rushed down the steps and curtseyed to the very ground itself. How can I find the right words to tell it all ? Snow-White certainly knew that dear Mother was a little short-sighted and that it was quite late and dusky, but she could not possibly believe that she was not recognised. She thought ' Dear Mother likes me to make fun of the Countess.' She knew, of course, how angry dear Mother was with her old mistress, and it never occurred to Snow-White that she would stand and curtsey to her. And Mother's face was aglow with joy, brighter than ever in her life before.

" Snow-White jumped from the saddle without help, just like the Countess, and threw the reins to Long-Bengt. Then she turned to dear Mother with outstretched hand and said, ' Eh bien, Raklitz, how are you getting on in your new position ? ' And just think of it ! No sooner had Snow-White said this than dear Mother bent over her hand and kissed it.

" Then at last Snow-White understood that

her Mother's eyes had deceived her and that she thought the Countess had come to call on her. And in her consternation Snow-White cried out, 'Dear Mother, it is only I!'

"Mother drew herself up and flung away her hand. She just gave one look at her step-daughter, then turned and rushed up the steps and into the kitchen.

"Dear Father, Sexton Moreus, and Ulla came round Snow-White now and laughed at her disguise. Alack, alack! She had to keep on acting a little while, because her Father looked so amused. But her heart was like lead within her at the remembrance of that one look. She thought to herself, 'Now I have made an enemy of dear Mother. She does not trouble about downright abuse, but she will never forgive anyone who makes a fool of her.'"

The Pastor's daughter paused a moment as if to hear what the other thought of her tale.

"It is really something to laugh at," said Anna Brogren, "but I cannot do it. It fills my heart with such anxiety. You had better go on at once so that I may hear what misery you—I mean Snow-White—brought upon herself."

And so the Pastor's daughter began again.

"I really must tell you of something funny that happened one day in the end of September. You will see, dear foster-sister, that it was nothing very important, but I think it gave Snow-White a little courage. Afterwards, whenever she remembered the incident, she used to

say to herself, ' After all, it is a good thing there is someone belonging to the house who is not afraid of Mother.' Otherwise she would have had to confess that everyone stood a little in dread of her, her Father not excepted. She could not in the least deny that Mother was very careful of him and so attentive that he scarcely dared to move. But ah, how frightened dear Father was to say ' no,' when dear Mother wanted anything. That was evident every day, but never so clearly as when Mother insisted on making brandy. Everybody said that dear Father would never have allowed it if she had not begged and prayed, for he had always been against it. In former times, whenever anyone suggested it, he had answered sharply that in a Pastor's house grain should be used for baking bread and boiling porridge, not for that fatal drink that only brought people to ruin. And he said exactly the same to dear Mother. She was not to be put off, however, and answered that if he wanted to put an end to all dram-drinking in the house she was quite agreed, but if anyway there must be brandy to offer to strangers, and for the servants, then she thought they might just as well make it themselves. It would cost only half as much, Mother said, and she worried and worried until he let her have her way.

" For the first distilling Mother borrowed a brandy vat with lid and pipe from a big house near, and as soon as it came she set to work and attended to it with the greatest care. What between soaking and fermentation she left the

brewing-maid no peace and was in the brewhouse all through the process. Certainly no one could reproach Mother with sparing herself. Dear Father, on the contrary, shut himself up the whole time and did not once honour Mother by peeping in at the brewhouse door and asking for a taste of the brew. She knew well enough that he still disapproved, and she knew that if only one of the workpeople took a little too much to drink, dear Father would seize the opportunity to forbid the whole performance. So dear Mother was most particular that none of her helpers should get too many sips, and such was her authority that she managed to keep good order all the time.

" Only one little misfortune happened.

" Dear Mother had quite finished the clearing and had not much else left to do, except to draw off the brandy in casks and bottles. She had also to dispose of the lees, but they were still warm, so she put them in a bucket outside the brewhouse door to cool. No sooner had they been put down than Long-Bengt went by. The bucket pulled and pulled him, but Mother, standing in the doorway, called out: 'Why, friend Bengt, you are surely not thinking of drinking that! It is not fit for human beings, only distiller's wash as it is.'

" Long-Bengt put on an innocent look and went his way. He was going to the dairy, of course, and there was surely no harm in passing the brewhouse door. Sure enough he went to the dairy to fetch the hay fork that the dairymaid had lent him and started off to take it back

with him to the stable. But when Long-Bengt opened the gate to the backyard, he came upon Big Billy standing with his nose between the palings sniffing away in the direction of the brewhouse. It was a fine day, so all the goats were out. But the others were on a wood pile, and Big Billy stood alone by the gate.

"No one can understand how Long-Bengt could be so clumsy, but he opened the gate so wide that Big Billy managed to push out past him. And he never even troubled to drive the creature back again as he ought to have done, but only just looked to see that the orchard gates were shut, to keep Big Billy from dear Father's apple trees and dear Mother's cabbage beds. Very likely he thought it wouldn't matter if he did get on to the lawn and crop a mouthful of grass. But you must know that Big Billy did not so much as glance at the good grass, but trotted away towards the brewhouse. He came tripping along so daintily and quietly that Mother never heard a sound, although the brewhouse door stood ajar.

"The creature had always had such refined manners. When he was thirsty, he neither lapped the water like a dog nor sucked it up like a horse, but drank so quietly that no one knew what he was about. Many a milk-can had Big Billy emptied behind the dairymaid's back, and now he managed to sup up all the brandy lees in peace and quiet without Mother having the least idea of what was happening. But when it was all gone, Big Billy began to bleat, as he always did, for he thought mischief

lost all its pleasure unless he was there to see how vexed and angry everyone was at his misdeeds. And in a moment Mother was on the threshold and saw the empty bucket.

"She seized the long, black stove-rake which always stood in the corner by the door and aimed a blow at Big Billy. But after all Billy's days of petting, he could not possibly believe that dear Mother was angry in good earnest, so up he got on his two hind legs and danced about before her. Now Big Billy was both strong and old and it was not always a joke to tackle him. Dear Mother struck out with the rake, and those who knew his temper felt that no good would come of it. So they all came, Father, Snow-White, and the maids running out of the house to help Mother. But Big Billy was doing her no harm, only hopping to and fro, so that Father told the others not to stop his game and at the same time he called out to Mother to hurry into the brewhouse and shut the door before play had become earnest.

"But Mother paid no heed to the warning and at last managed to give Big Billy such a hard knock that he felt it. Down he came on all fours, not that that made it any better, for now he rushed into the brewhouse and used his horns to crash down every bottle and jug he could reach. And no sooner had dear Mother got in after him than he was out again.

"Now Big Billy knew that he had given Mother enough to do with picking up what he had knocked down to keep her out of the way for a little, whilst he went on with his joke. So

he stood a few seconds outside the brewhouse door looking round, and then began to climb quietly up the hill to the big house.

"Big Billy generally had something grave and dignified about him, a gift by no means to be despised, for who could possibly suspect such a stately creature of even a thought of mischief? And never had he looked so splendid as now when up he went stepping slowly along, lifting each foot high and throwing his head back with his nose up in the air, as if to show off his great beard and long horns. Yet that it was not quite all in earnest was plain enough by his dancing eye and the sideward twist of his hindquarters.

"Father thought that Big Billy was off to the other goats behind the house, so he called out to Snow-White and the other womenkind to get out of the great goat's way and not irritate him. But if that had been Big Billy's intention, he changed his mind as he passed the porch and saw that the door had been left wide open when they had all rushed out to drive him away. And just as he was walking along with his most dignified step he gave one spring up the steps and ran into the house.

"The maids rushed after in a body to drive him out. Then he took refuge on the garret steps and when they followed him up to the garret, out he jumped through the window without troubling to look first how far it was from the ground.

"But his usual luck did not forsake him, and so it happened that he hit upon the very

window which was exactly above the porch roof.

" It was a little, steep roof with a narrow ridge upon which Big Billy alighted. He could not move an inch to right or left without falling and it did not seem possible either for him to turn back into the garret again.

" ' Get in with you, Big Billy,' cried dear Father as he shook his cane at him. But Big Billy did not budge. The maids had come out again and were in despair over what might happen to him. But Big Billy looked quite pleased. As he turned his head and winked at them, it was plain how greatly he enjoyed their terror.

" Mother had picked up her bottles and was coming, rake in hand, to chastise Big Billy. When he caught sight of her he winked more wickedly than before ; evidently he hadn't the slightest respect for dear Mother.

" Once more she struck at him with the rake and as she did it he gathered his feet together, flew through the air like an arrow and came down on the ground just in front of her.

" And no sooner was he there than he got on his hind legs and gave Mother a tap that knocked her down. Then away rushed Big Billy to the back garden, bounded over the gate and spent the next few hours dancing to his wives.

" But no one troubled about him just then. They had all rushed forward to help Mother, and the first to reach her was Snow-White. But Mother pushed her violently away. ' Don't

touch me,' she snapped. 'I know your feelings towards me, and can see this just pleases you. Laugh away whilst you can. I know something that will make you cry.'

"And it was true enough that Snow-White had not looked very much upset, for she had laughed so much at the great goat that she could not be serious again in a moment. But Mother's words made her sad enough all day long.

"And my dear foster-sister will easily understand that it wasn't this that gave Snow-White fresh courage, but a little dream that she dreamt the night after. For then Snow-White saw a great goat standing again on the porch roof, but it was no longer a real goat, but all the gaiety and good temper that had lived in this home of old, which had crept out on the roof and was up there openly defying Mother. The creature could talk too, and told Mother that she would never be able to work her will and turn this house into a hard, cold prison. There was too much of its former spirit still left in it to fight against her.

"And when Snow-White awoke she thought it had all been true and felt no longer quite so lonely in her struggle with dear Mother."

"You may be very sure I shall take some slices of bread for Big Billy the next time I go to see Snow-White," said Anna Brogren as the Pastor's daughter paused for a moment.

"I am afraid the kind thought comes too late," said her foster-sister. "For Snow-White tells me in her last letter that dear Mother has sent him to the butcher."

"Look at that now," said Anna Brogren thoughtfully, "look at that now! And Snow-White's father let him be killed without a word! I tell you, I begin to think Snow-White's stepmother will do her a mischief."

But the Pastor's daughter broke in with a hasty: "Oh, it is not the stepmother who hurts Snow-White. On the contrary, she says Snow-White's one thought is to do *her* some ill."

"She might know better."

"Everything goes wrong for Snow-White. I will just tell you one thing more to show you how unfortunate she is."

"I should like to hear the whole of the tale," said Anna Brogren, "but indeed I can see well enough that it is Snow-White who is in danger and not her stepmother."

"There is no need to tell my dear foster-sister that it was Snow-White's Father who had planted all the Parsonage grounds. They had to thank him for the gooseberries, the currants, the rare strawberries, the great kitchen garden and the little rose-bed to the west of the house. But the very best in dear Father's orchard was, after all, the apple trees. He had planted and grafted them with his own hands, and I think you might go a long way before you would see the like of the fruit they bore. Whenever Snow-White ate any of Father's apples she always thought they tasted as though they were made of nothing but sunshine and summer warmth. Never had Snow-White seen such beautiful apples in the orchard as this summer. Such pearmains, astrachans, golden pippins,

Tom Putts, codlins, reinettes and winter apples! Perhaps the trees were not so heavily laden as sometimes, but their fruit was all the finer for it. Not a single apple was worm-eaten, they were all alike big and beautiful. How transparent the skin of the Tom Putts, how golden the pippins, whilst every pearmain blushed a dark crimson and not an astrachan but had a bright rosy cheek. The apples were really such a splendid crop that they were the talk of the whole country-side. They were so big and fine that they brightened up the road and passers-by used to come down to the house and ask for leave to go into the orchard and look at them.

"But I must just say that nice and beautiful as apples are, they bring a great deal of worry. It is useless to deny that in former years a great quantity of the Parsonage apples had been stolen, but this year scarcely one was lost in this way, for Mother never wearied in her watch over them. Ever since the end of August, when the apples began to ripen, she had been in the orchard every evening on guard.

"But Mother did more than this. She protected the apples from the home people too, for she had padlocks put on the orchard gates and always kept the keys in her pocket. If she found a specially big shiny nonesuch, she might perhaps gather it for dear Father, but neither Grandmother Beata nor Snow-White ever got so much as a bite.

"Yes, indeed, in other years the apples may not have been so fine, but they had given more

pleasure, for there had been no one about the house who had not eaten their fill of them. And not only that, but everyone who came to the Parsonage got a taste, and most carried home a little basketful as well. Even when the gathering-time came, not an apple was eaten, for Mother saw to the work herself. She put on gloves and plucked each apple slowly and carefully, so that they should not be pinched or bruised.

" Snow-White did indeed think it was a little hard not to have the apples whilst they still had their fresh summer flavour, but she consoled herself with the thought of how nice it would be to have them to eat all the autumn and winter. For no doubt Mother knew how to keep them so that they would not decay. But she soon learnt that dear Mother had other plans. Not for one moment had she thought of letting the Parsonage people sit and eat her apples.

" Dear Father, of course, would have liked to keep his apples in his house as he had always done, but dear Mother reckoned they could make money by them. She meant to sell all the beautiful fruit at Broby fair. And, of course, Mother had her way. She drove to the fair with two carts full of apples, and a man and maid to help her sell them.

" When she came to the market-place she put up her stall, opened her boxes and barrels and laid out the apples. Mother was not afraid of any kind of work and stood before her stall with great gloves on her hands and a thick shawl knotted round her waist to sell her fruit

herself. She was not going to trust this work to anyone else. And she might well be proud of such wares as she had to offer.

" Her stall shone so with red, white, green and yellow that people crowded round just for the pleasure of looking at it. Now at the big Broby fair there were always fruit growers from the Sörmland mansions and from the country estates in Näset, but not one of them had such fine fruit as Mother.

" As soon as she was ready to sell, everyone hurried up and asked what she wanted for her apples. But Mother asked so much that they were amazed and refused to buy.

" So she had to sit there with her treasure and see how the market people bought instead from her neighbours. But she would not yield, nor lower her prices by a single farthing. She asked just double the price of anyone else. No doubt she thought she would sell them later on when the strangers had got rid of all theirs.

" Perhaps, too, Mother reckoned on something else as well. She knew well enough how much brandy was generally drunk at Broby fair, and that after twelve o'clock there was scarcely a sober man to be found, so maybe she thought that by afternoon the peasant folk wouldn't be so careful of their money. It looked, too, as though Mother might be right. The later it grew, the more people gathered round her stall, at first, all the small boys and girls at the fair with their fingers in their mouths and such pathetic longing in their faces for the apples they had no money to buy ; but after-

wards grown-up people too stood hanging about, as though they could not keep their eyes off the fruit. From time to time one and another came and asked the price, but Mother stuck to her first answer and asked as much as in the morning. She was not going to sell for less, when everyone else's apples were all gone ; her turn was coming now, no doubt !

" Dear Mother saw the desire for apples in every face, and thought with every passing moment : ' It will soon be too much for them, they only want someone to make a start.'

" But time went on and on, and even Mother must have begun to think that she would have to go home with all her apples unsold. So she determined to make a last effort and sent her maid to look for Snow-White, who was away amongst the stalls buying presents for all at home who had not been able to get to the fair.

" When Snow-White came back to Mother she ordered her to take her place for a time and sell the apples. Mother had been standing on the same spot all day long and her feet were so frozen that she felt she must move about a little.

" It was not with the best will in the world that Snow-White took her place to sell at Broby fair, but as she did not dare to say ' No ' to Mother, she tied the shawl round her shoulders, drew on Mother's gloves, and stood instead of her before the stall. And with many a warning to Snow-White not to lower the price for anyone who wanted to drive a bargain, nor to eat the apples herself, Mother went her way.

" But if she thought people would buy from her stepdaughter more readily than from her she was mistaken.

" Snow-White just had to stand there in the same way, guarding the apples without selling a single one. Old and young still gathered in a close ring round her, but no one offered to buy.

" Then a couple of half-tipsy young peasants came along with their sweethearts on their arms and forced their way through the crowd. They were excited and talking in loud voices and rattling their money as though it burnt their pockets. Snow-White was so frightened of them that she would have liked to run away, but she stuck to her post in the hope of at last selling something.

" But they came up to her and the first of them, without ever asking the price, straightway put his great fist over a heap of the best apples. At the same time he glanced at Snow-White and tried to look as sober and honest as possible, whilst he asked, ' Where do these apples come from ? ' Snow-White answered that they were from her own home.

" ' Yes, I have been there many a time,' said the young fellow, ' and I know you and your Father ; a nice man the Pastor is too.'

" Snow-White gave a friendly answer, she liked him for speaking well of dear Father.

" ' I know you and he are both kind folk,' went on the farm man ; ' kind enough to let a poor servant taste your apples without paying for them.'

" And before Snow-White knew what he was about, he had snatched a great handful of the beautiful apples and rushed off. And the sweetheart on his arm took some too as she ran after him and so did his friend and his friend's sweetheart.

" But poor Snow-White had never dreamt of such a thing and was in utter despair that they had run off with so many apples and left no money instead. She wanted to run after them and get them back, but she did not dare, so she sent the man and maidservant who were standing behind her to catch them up. As they went she noticed the whole crowd moving close up to the stall. ' Now they are coming to buy,' she thought, and plucked up fresh courage.

" But not a bit of it ! They never thought of such a thing, but ran up, ten at a time, and took as many apples as they could, whilst they cried out that she and her Father were far too kind to ask poor folk to pay for a couple of apples. And the little boys who had stood all day with their eyes on the shining fruit, pulled off their caps and filled them, whilst the little girls, who knew what watering mouths meant, rushed up and swept scores of apples into their aprons.

" Snow-White threw herself over the stall to protect it with her body. But what good was that ? And she cried and entreated and told them how miserable they made her, but who paid any heed to her ? It was not only the little boys and girls who snatched her treasure, but grown-up folk as well. And how

they laughed and joked and thought it was only a little fair-day fun, as everyone who helped himself called out to her that she and her Father were far too kind to grudge them a couple of apples.

"Snow-White struck out right and left and screamed for help, but the apples were gone.

"The fair-folk cleared her stall before her eyes, overturned her boxes and barrels, and took all the fruit. There were plenty of wild good-for-nothings at the fair who came to take their part in the fun, which soon ended in fisticuffs and blows, so that Snow-White had to leave her wares to their fate and run away to escape being trampled to death.

"Just then back came Mother and found her stepdaughter robbed and weeping despairing tears of mingled fear and anger.

"Dear Mother seized her by the arm and shook her soundly. 'You wait till we get home to-night,' said she, 'and I'll teach you to give away my apples.'

"Indeed, it was no wonder that Mother was vexed, still it was hard that she should think her stepdaughter had done it on purpose.

"What a wretched home-going it was! They all sat in the carriage, Father, Mother, and Snow-White, and at first Father tried to chat away as usual. But Mother sat bolt upright in one corner with tight-shut lips and would not utter a word, whilst Snow-White did nothing but cry. Dear Father couldn't take the loss of a few apples so much to heart and he was amused at the folk calling out that he was too kind to grudge them

a couple of apples. He tried to keep up his spirits by talking to all the other homegoers as he passed them. He asked if they had got good prices for their cows, what they had given for their sheep, and if they had come across any of his apples.

"But after a while he grew strangely silent. He turned to Mother and sat for a long time looking at her, then stared straight in front of him, and his face grew all at once very old and weary.

"A little later Snow-White noticed that dear Father looked long and sadly at her, as though he was trying to read the thoughts of her inmost heart.

"Then he said, 'You grow very like your Mother,' and taking her hand in both of his he sat gently stroking it. It seemed as though her Father wanted to comfort and help her. Snow-White thought: 'Dear Father understands that I did not do it on purpose. He knows I am not like that.'

"Father held her hand all the way home, but his head fell lower and lower, and when the carriage stopped at the door he sank down altogether. Nor did he stir when Mother and Snow-White got up. They thought he was dead.

"But it was not quite so bad as that, although it very nearly was."

The Pastor's daughter stopped a moment. Her voice shook, and she needed a little time to steady it before she could go on.

"Now you know how I am placed," she said.

"Mother can do what she will to me and I cannot complain to dear Father for fear he should have another stroke as he had when he drove home from the fair, thinking of the quarrel between us."

"But can he not see it himself?"

"Maybe he sees, but he can do nothing. Father is supposed to be quite well again, but I know how weak he is. He has no longer a will of his own. Never again can dear Father be what he was that fine morning when he and I went together to look at the field of hay."

CHAPTER V

THE PASTOR OF SVARTSJÖ

EARLY on New Year's Eve the Pastor popped his head in at the kitchen door. What had they done with little Stormwind? He hadn't seen her out with her toboggan on the hill. Surely they didn't mean to keep her sitting indoors from morning to night like the other womenfolk.

It was Little-Maid he was asking for. On her very first day in Lövdala he had taken her with him to the tool-house and looked out a sleigh for her. And every morning since he had come to remind her to go out and coast.

At the same time he used to take the opportunity of teasing the housekeeper and maids a little by asking them if they really preferred sitting shut up in the kitchen all day.

But this time he quickly got his answer that the child had meant to go out as usual, but her mother had just come to see her. So Little-Maid had taken her to the dairy to look at the cows.

The Pastor stepped back and shut the door. He stood still for a minute or two thinking, then turned his steps to the dairy.

The kitchen-folk followed him with their

eyes as he went. He looked old and weak after his illness in the autumn, but it was an understood thing that he must speak to everyone who came to the house, so it was some time before he could get as far as Marit of Koltorp. To begin with, Long-Bengt called out to him that a man had just brought a sick horse to ask if the Pastor knew of any remedy. And as soon as he had attended to the horse, up came two peasants who had to divide an inheritance and wanted him to say how much each ought to have, so that they need not take the matter into court. And it took a good hour before he could settle the matter sufficiently to offer them a drink to seal their agreement.

Meanwhile Little-Maid was sitting in a dark corner of the dairy talking to her mother, each of them on a milking-stool, and Little-Lad on his sister's lap. He had been so pleased to see her again that there was no getting him away.

Mother and her little son had stayed on a few days at Nugord, but now they were going home and had taken the longer road past Lövdala to see how Little-Maid was getting on.

Little-Maid had surely never before felt such happiness as when she saw her mother step into the kitchen, coming as she did in the very nick of time to help her in her great trouble.

When they got down to the dairy Mother had, first of all, to say what she thought of the new tale of Snow-White that Little-Maid had been lying listening to for the last two nights. Was it possible that the Pastor's daughter had been talking of herself?

When Little-Maid had told it all as well as she could, her Mother was silent for a long time, but at last she said : " I expect they did not think you were wise enough to understand what they said. But as you were, you must just show you are wise enough too, not to repeat it."

But that was not all. Little-Maid had something else upon her mind as well. Yesterday morning the Pastor's wife had come to her and asked so gently and kindly if she was happy, or if she felt homesick. No, indeed, of course she was happy and so comfortable. And she did so love the hens.

" Oh, yes," laughed the Pastor's wife ; " and is there no one else you love besides the hens ? "

Indeed, yes ; Little-Maid loved the Pastor's daughter as well.

And the Pastor's wife had laughed again. Why was it that she loved Mamsell Maia Lisa ?

" Because she talked so beautifully."

" Well now," said the Pastor's wife. " Can you understand how she knows all she tells you ? "

" I expect she finds it in the books that she sits reading at night," was Little-Maid's answer.

" Oh, she sits reading at night, does she ? " asked the Pastor's wife in the same gentle tone. " Then I suppose she has a candle."

" She reads by some light, I know," answered Little-Maid.

Now that night no sooner had the Pastor's daughter and Little-Maid got into bed than

the Pastor's wife came in as usual and took away their candle.

But when the house was quiet, the Pastor's daughter got up and fetched the tallow candle which she had hidden in the great grandfather clock, crept out into the kitchen, blew up the embers in the grate to get a light and sat down to read. She had a brother away in Upsala who used to write verses and send them to her, for he knew she was desperately fond of such things. And to-night she was learning them by heart. She must have been reading something very beautiful for she did not hear the door open, and never lifted her head until the Pastor's wife stood over her and stretched out her hand to take the light from the candlestick.

"I suppose you want to bring us all to the poorhouse," said her stepmother, "sitting here burning a light all night. Where did you get it from?"

"It is not dear Mother's candle," said the Pastor's daughter.

"Whoever it belongs to, I'll see to it that you don't sit here bringing us to poverty," said her stepmother. "I'll teach you to waste the candles, I can tell you."

With this she went away, but soon came back with a great piece of linen over her arm.

"Since you like sitting up at night," she said, "you can at any rate make yourself useful. See to it that this sheet is seamed up by to-morrow morning."

And then she did go, but her stepdaughter had to sit up all night over her sewing.

And someone else had no sleep either, and that was Little-Maid, who lay there reproaching herself for having ever said that the Pastor's daughter used to sit up reading at night.

And this was why she had been so glad to see her mother.

She could picture no greater misfortune than that Mamsell Maia Lisa should get to know what she had done, and she begged her mother to take her home. She could not stay at the Parsonage.

Mother reminded her how comfortable she was, but Little-Maid did not mind being cold and hungry if only she could get away before the Pastor's daughter was angry with her. But Mother insisted she should stay. "Raklitza shan't go on domineering like this long," she said. "I will speak to the Pastor myself. I have known him many a long day and I think he'll believe me."

At that moment Little-Lad pointed to the door. "There's someone standing there," he said.

Little-Maid and her mother turned round at once. There stood the Pastor in the shadow a few paces from them, leaning motionless against the wall. They were so terrified that they did not venture to get up and say good morning. When had he come and how much had he heard?

"Marit, come along with your milking-stool," he said in a weak voice.

She hurried up with the little stool, and he sank down on it.

"Don't fetch anyone," said the Pastor; "it is only a giddy turn; you know I have had them all my life."

They stood helpless before him. Marit of Koltorp was astounded to see how old he had grown. She had not noticed it so much at her brother's Christmas dinner, but now she saw how thin and shrunken he looked.

"It isn't dangerous," he went on; "but it comes pretty often nowadays. You see, Marit, I am about done for."

Very soon after he got up. "Don't say anything about it up at the house," he said, as he went out of the dairy with bent head and faltering steps.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAGIC PANCAKE

LATE on New Year's Eve the Pastor's daughter came walking down the hillside to the brewhouse room where her Grandmother, Fru Beata Spaak, had lived for many a long year.

She was leading Little-Maid by the hand, and you could hear them coming, a long way off, by the little shrill screams they uttered every time they lost the path and stepped into the snow-drift at the edge. It was foggy and pitch dark, without the least glimmer from moon or stars, and, but for the tiny glint of light through Grandmother's shutters, they could scarcely have groped their way to the brewhouse.

That Christmas there had been so dreadfully many feasts both for rich and poor that the days had been only too short for them all. The Pastor and his wife had even been obliged to go away on New Year's Eve, but Mamsell Maia Lisa had not gone with them as she usually did.

She had been ordered to stay at home and see that the men and maids were properly provided with the same quantity of fish and

porridge as on Christmas Eve, just as if the old housekeeper could not have managed it all quite well.

But, in spite of this, the Pastor's daughter was in very good spirits. A good part of the afternoon she had been telling tales and singing folk-songs to Little-Maid, who had surely never enjoyed herself so much before. After supper, Mamsell Maia Lisa had point-blank refused to go to bed. She said, on New Year's Eve, she would, at any rate, try to peep a little into the future before she went to sleep. Wouldn't Little-Maid like to help make a magic pancake?

Little-Maid had no idea what a magic pancake was, but she said "yes" at once, and she would have said the same even if Mamsell Maia Lisa had invited her to help make a viper soup.

"But you mustn't speak nor laugh all the time we are making it," said the Pastor's daughter, "and you mustn't spill on to the floor the least drop of water or grain of flour or salt."

"What is there hard in that?" said Little-Maid. She could keep from talking or laughing as long as ever she wanted.

But then came the difficulty that there must be three to help in the making, and the Pastor's daughter had no idea where she was to find the third.

They went into the kitchen and asked if there was anyone there who would help make a magic pancake. But the maids only threw

up their hands and declined when they heard the question.

They had done enough of that in their day. After they had eaten the magic pancake, they had had neither sleep nor dreams, and they were not going to be tempted to try such a dish again !

The Pastor's daughter stood and thought and thought.

" We shall have to go down and ask Grandmother to help us," she said.

And this was why they were out on that dark New Year's Eve picking their way amongst the snow-drifts. But the Pastor's daughter thought it only fitting that a New Year's Eve should be pitchy dark, a true picture of that future which no eye can pierce.

Grandmother lived in a garret room above the brewhouse. How hard it was to climb the stairway, built out, as it was, from the wall, with its narrow steep steps so slippery now with trampled snow that to tread on them was almost to risk one's life.

But everyone had to get used to the dark at Lövdala, for the Pastor's wife allowed no lights except in the dairy and stable. However, Grandmother must have heard them coming, for when they were half-way up the stair she set the door wide open. And she had her branched candlestick alight on the table before the sofa and the fire crackling in the stove.

Grandmother was tall and thin and looked delicate. She was not at all like the Pastor's daughter in face, nor could she very well be,

for she was only her Mother's stepmother. But she was just as fond of her as if she had been her own flesh and blood. It seemed as though Fru Beata had some special art of her own, for whatever it might be like in other places, in her home it was always warm, bright, and tidy. She had but the one room, where she lived and slept; but her bed, with its white curtains hanging down from a gilded curtain-rod, was an ornament in itself, and the same might be said of her bright little copper pans and china plates and dishes in the corner cupboard. She was refined and graceful herself; but her hands were so tortured with gout, that her fingers were twisted and stiff; so twisted, indeed, that it was no easy matter to shake hands with her, for it was almost impossible to get a firm hold of them.

The Pastor's daughter told their errand, and Grandmother, with a smile, promised her help. There was someone she was just expecting, and she would like to know if he was coming next year.

It was best, of course, to stay in Grandmother's room and make the pancake there. First they took down a dish out of the little corner cupboard behind the stove, all three holding on to the edge and putting it on the little kitchen table. Then they must get a wooden spoon, so all three went to the little corner cupboard which served as Grandmother's china pantry, all three held the spoon-handle, and laid it on the dish. Next they poured in three spoonfuls of water which all three fetched

from the great copper pitcher, and no one spoke or laughed as they went about their work.

That done, three spoonfuls of flour had to go into the water. All three held the spoon as they dipped it into the flour-tub, all three lifted it up, and emptied the flour into the water. No one left hold of the spoon, no one spoke, no one laughed, and no one let the least grain of flour drop to the ground. Then they added three spoonfuls of salt, and again not a word, nor a laugh, nor a single grain spilt.

But will you believe that when they had got as far as that Grandmother asked if it must be put straightway into the frying-pan!

The moment she asked the question, down went the spoon, and the Pastor's daughter threw herself on a chair and laughed and laughed. Little-Maid kept her fingers on it indeed, but was so overcome with the fun that she had to fall on the floor and have her laugh out there! Grandmother's lips twitched a little too; perhaps the words wouldn't have slipped out if she had not remembered of old that there was no fun at all in making a dream pancake, unless some such little misfortune happened. And she liked to see the Pastor's daughter forget all her troubles and have a little laugh.

And when they had laughed their fill they set about their work once more, for nothing that they had prepared was of any more use, and they had to begin again from the beginning.

But that was not so easy when they were once well overcome with laughter.

First they poured three spoonfuls of water into the dish. They got no farther before they burst out laughing again. The Pastor's daughter was the worst. Little-Maid was not nearly so bad as she. But for fully five minutes more they were helpless with merriment. Then the Pastor's daughter told the others that they really must behave properly or the magic pancake would not be ready till all hours of the night.

"I fancy we shall manage," said Grandmother, "if only you can be serious yourself."

First they put in the water, then the flour and then the salt, and stirred it all up into a dough. All three held the spoon whilst they stirred with never a word, never a laugh, nor the least drop spilt on the floor. When they had rolled it into a pancake they laid it in the frying-pan. And it didn't look a bit tastier than the mess of meal that fowls and pigs get for their breakfast. It was really not so good, for it was quite stiff and hard, and glistening with all the salt they had put in.

They put it on the fire and let one side cook and then turned it, all holding the spoon, all helping to turn, and no one dropping it in the cinders. At last it was ready and had to be eaten.

The Pastor's daughter and Little-Maid were by this time so eager that there was not the least danger of their laughing. They were too busy thinking that now they might perhaps

get a glimpse into the far future to be willing to throw away such a great opportunity.

The dream pancake shone so with salt that it needed some courage to taste it. But they divided it into three portions, and then ate them as best they could. Little-Maid ate up her share, for she knew that was the proper way, and she was very particular to carry out all directions. Grandmother only tasted a tiny, tiny bit, and it is not certain that she swallowed it either. The Pastor's daughter ate just one mouthful, for much as she wished to know the future, she was really not able to get down a single crumb more. The two girls were both a little disappointed in the magic pancake, but not a word did either of them say. They only nodded good night to Grandmother as she stood in the doorway silently lighting them down the stair.

They tore at full speed over the path up the garden, for the night no longer seemed so dark and impenetrable as before, but rather as if it was waiting to draw aside the veil, and show them all its hidden secrets, but they dared not stay to look.

The maids were already in bed when they crept through the kitchen, but, of course, they all asked them how they had got on, if they had dreamed yet, and whom they had dreamt about. But all to no purpose, for not a word was to be got out of them.

Little-Maid's eyes closed as she lay down, and she slept till next morning. When she did awake she had a salt taste in her mouth, but

try as she might she could not remember any dream at all. Grandmother did not sleep at all, but next day she sat quiet and silent as though still in a dream; it seemed as if she really must have learnt something. Neither was the Pastor's daughter able to get much sleep, for she had been so parched with thirst, and yet it would never have done to drink anything before she fell asleep—even a single drop would have spoilt the whole charm. When she awoke in the morning she could not clearly recollect if she had dreamt anything.

But, later in the day, she chanced to go out into the porch. And then she stopped short, for she remembered that the night before in her dream she had stood just on the same spot. And as she stood there two strangers—an old man and a young—had come walking up the gravel path. And the old one had said that he was Pastor Liliecrona, and had come with his son to ask if she was thirsty and would like a drink of water. And the young man had stepped forward at once with a glass of clear fresh water in his hand, and offered it to her.

But when the Pastor's daughter remembered this she was so filled with amazement that she trembled in every limb. For if one thing is sure and certain it is that he who steps forward and offers you water in your dream after the magic pancake, he and he alone will in time to come be your wedded husband.

CHAPTER VII

THE BRIDE'S DANCE

ON Twelfth-Night the Pastor and his wife had been to church, and were now on their way home after the service. She was half-frozen in the sleigh after sitting still for two hours in the cold church. How glad she was to know that they did not need to drive all the way home to Lövdala, but could break their journey at Lobyn, where they were bidden to the wedding feast of a well-to-do peasant. They would be saved at least a quarter of their cold drive. She could think of nothing else, but how annoying it was that the Parsonage lay away at the far end of the parish, all but six whole miles from the church. The church itself was well situated in the middle of the parish, and was easily reached from every direction. Not so the Parsonage, which was a good twelve miles from all the houses lying far away to the south of the parish. And how difficult it was for the Pastor's wife to get to church every Sunday, as was but fit and proper! It took a good four hours before she could get home again; and on Communion Sundays maybe even five or six. And when she got home she was quite certain to find the old

housekeeper had cooked the dinner too soon, so that it had been waiting several hours and everything was dried up and burnt.

The same thoughts filled her mind every time she had to drive home from church cold and hungry. If she could only manage by some means or other to get a shorter way to church. If it had only been a question of inducing the parishioners to sell the old Parsonage and build a new one nearer the church, that in itself would have been difficult enough. But it was a much more intricate matter than that.

Good gracious, how vexatious it was that Svartsjö was, to begin with, only an offshoot of the great Church of Bro! From very early times it had been ordained that the rural dean of Bro should also be the rector of Svartsjö, and get half the stipend, and, of course, no change was possible in such an old-established custom as that. Or else, it really did seem as though her husband who had all the work ought also to have all the stipend. But he was only an assistant pastor, and had to be content with the usual assistant stipend. And the congregation was but a small and poor one, so that if their Pastor had only had what they gave him to live on, he would have been a pauper indeed.

If the Pastor of Svartsjö happened to be a little better off than other assistant ministers it was only because he not only had a house of his own, but enough land to give him his living. If he had not had that, he would have been in a poor case indeed. Of course she was

glad that he owned Lövdala; indeed she would be the last to grumble about it. It was a fine property with a nice house and good land. Its only fault was that it lay so far from the church. Yet not quite the only fault! There was just one more. Those who lived on it seemed to think themselves a little better than other folk. She, who had seen really great places, could only laugh at the very idea, but in the parish it was reckoned quite a distinction to live at Lövdala. Even the Countess at Borg was not thought so much of as the Pastor's family.

For her part she could never understand how that had come about.

A hundred years ago the whole of Lövdala had been nothing but a peasant-holding. It may have been large and rich enough, for no doubt they had splendid pasture lands on the bed of the old lake. But all the same it had been a peasant-holding and nothing more, and she would almost have said it was nothing more even now. Up there in Värmland, of course, there was nobody who knew what a real gentleman's country-seat looked like.

It was nothing remarkable that the rich peasant's son should manage to study and pass a contemptible priest's examination, and become assistant pastor of Svartsjö. Neither was there anything astounding in his marrying one of the rural dean's daughters. After all, he had never got any farther than Lövdala, but had stayed there all his life. He was said to have been a clever man, but that was hard to believe, or else he

would surely have been made Pastor of some larger place.

No doubt he had been very comfortably off, for he had inherited Lövdala from his parents and could live there. He had not needed to go, hat in hand, to the peasants for their tithes and offerings. He lived on his own property, was quite independent, and as good as any one of them. And that, no doubt, had been as much to their liking as to his.

During the lifetime of this first Lövdala pastor there had been indeed no parsonage belonging to the parish, but there was one now, a small property adjoining Lövdala.

It seemed to her pure stupidity of the peasants to build the Parsonage there. They had not troubled the least that the Pastor had so far to go to the church. They had had quite another object in view, and that they had achieved. The second Pastor had married the first's daughter, and inherited and lived in Lövdala. In this way he too had become a well-to-do peasant-holder of independent means, and not simply a poor assistant minister. And he too had stayed all his life in Svartsjö. He was said to have been a remarkable preacher, but she did not believe that either. She imagined that it was only because he had married one of their own Pastor's daughters and lived at Lövdala that the Svartsjö folk insisted upon his great gifts of oratory.

The Pastor's wife raised her muff and covered her face. The road went straight over the old lake-bed, and the cold breeze always blowing

there nipped her ears. But her thoughts only travelled the faster.

It was plainly enough only the fact that the pastors of the parish must of necessity live at Lövdala, which made it so impossible to get a shorter road to church. Her husband was now the third Pastor in succession who lived there. He had acted in the same way as his predecessors, married the Pastor's daughter and inherited the estate. He had made his home in Lövdala, but the Parsonage ground was so close that he could quite well manage that too, and with his two properties he was a well-to-do man. This was such a good arrangement that there was not a soul in the parish but wished its continuance as long as Svartsjö had a pastor and people. She could not deny that it had been a capital thing for the other Lövdala pastors, for she did not believe that they had been fit for anything better than to stay here all their lives. But it was a never-ending pity that her husband had lost his heart to both property and parish and was still here. For she would wager her life that he could have had the best living in the diocese any day if he had chosen to take it. She knew exactly why he liked Svartsjö so much. Since the same family had been pastors of the parish for so many years, and since both Pastors and Pastors' wives had been so much beloved, they had got into a position of great authority. No one undertook anything at all without first going to the Parsonage for advice, and that was what he liked. Once she had mentioned

to him that he might have had a larger church. Yes, he agreed, but then perhaps he would not have had so much influence. Here he thought he ruled over the whole parish.

It was, indeed, no easy matter to change all this. No doubt it was a capital thing for a young minister to marry one of the daughters of the Lövdala Pastor. He got a competence at once, an easily worked parish, and, for the rest, did not everyone say that to get a wife as beautiful and capable as any of the daughters of the Lövdala Parsonage was a fortune in itself? That might be true enough of those who had lived there before her time, but as far as Maia Lisa was concerned, it certainly was not a fact. The Pastor's wife saw no beauty in her long face, nor could she see that she was fit for anything either. Of course she was doing her best now to improve her, but she got no help in that from anyone, scarcely even from her Father, who ought to have been the first to wish his daughter to grow into a sensible creature with thoughts for something besides play. All the same she meant to do her duty by her. There were not many who would venture to correct the heiress to Lövdala and to the whole parish.

The air round them resounded with the tinkling of bells, for here in Lobyn there were four cross-roads, and sleighs were coming from all directions bringing guests to the wedding. It was evidently going to be a grand affair. What a mercy she had managed to prevent her stepdaughter from coming with them! It was

just in these old peasant-houses that they made the most fuss of her. It was only to be expected that she should grow idle and haughty, and begin to think she could do whatever she chose. Yes, indeed, she was the best judge of what was good for her. But for the present she was not going to say so, not even to herself. Perhaps, however, she might be able to kill two birds with one stone; might get, maybe, a shorter road to church and, at the same time, teach her stepdaughter that she was no princess, but only a poor, insignificant Pastor's daughter. . . . There now, had she not known that she would have to put up with all this? She had not crossed the threshold before everyone began asking why the Pastor's daughter had not come too. Before she had unbuttoned her fur coat she had to explain, at least ten times, how tiresome it was that Maia Lisa would not leave her old Grandmother alone at home. Most inquirers were satisfied with this answer, but the givers of the wedding-feast wanted a better reason than that. Old Biorn Hindriksson and his wife had had to work away for many a long year before they could persuade their youngest granddaughter, who was to have their house and land after them, to marry the man they had chosen for her. And as a reward for her consent they wanted now to give her the finest wedding in their power.

Biorn Hindriksson was so old that he remembered Herr Olavus, the first Lövdala Pastor, and his wife, Fru Katrina Hesselgren, and he had never lost the respect he had for

them. As long as there was still a descendant of Herr Olavus in the parish she must come to the marriage-feast if it were not to be shorn of half its glory. He would not accept the excuse that the Pastor's daughter could not leave home on her Grandmother's account, and asked at once if one of the maids could not have given an eye to Fru Beata for that day at least. Besides, she was not on her death-bed!

His tone of voice showed plainly enough that he was really sorry, and not speaking just for form's sake. Glad as he was to see the Pastor's new wife, it could nevertheless not be denied that she did not belong to the old Parsonage family.

The Pastor's wife replied that she had been of the same opinion as he, and said so too. But there it was: the Pastor's daughter was so bound up in the old lady that it was a sheer impossibility to get her away if her Grandmother was the least ailing.

Now the Pastor's wife had taken off her wraps and knew in her own mind that she was a fine-looking woman and well dressed too, so that they might search the land for a more dignified Pastor's wife. And yet these peasant-folk seemed to have no eyes for her at all.

Biorn Hindriksson's wife wondered why Fru Beata herself had not made her granddaughter go. She must have known that not a wedding had taken place in their time where one of the old Pastor's family had not danced with the bride.

The Pastor's wife drew herself up and answered sharply that she had not known it was a matter of such moment, or she herself would have stayed at home instead. However, she would drive home, now at once, and then Maia Lisa could come.

With that the Pastor's wife won the day. The peasant hosts were terribly vexed that they had offended her, and ended by begging and praying her to stay.

But it was the same question and answer over and over again when she went upstairs to the large room where she had to go round shaking hands with all the guests, who stood leaning against the walls, waiting for the marriage ceremony. She had been cold all day, but she was soon warm enough now. There was no end to their questions about Maia Lisa until she took her place on the sofa. The two most important peasants' wives sat on either side of her, and they were silent as wax figures. They knew, indeed, that it was no fitting time to chatter when they were sitting and waiting for anything so solemn as the marriage service!

She felt that her cheeks were flaming red How they had all attacked her! They had not plagued the Pastor with their questions. Did they think that he no longer had any voice in the matter?

Ulla Moreus, the sexton's wife, appeared in the doorway and stepped forward to shake hands with her. Of course there would be more questions to answer now, for she was one

of Maia Lisa's best friends. However, she did not seem to be thinking of Maia Lisa. She and her Mother-in-law were there dressing the bride. They had finished now, but they wondered——

Indeed it would be such a help to them if Fru Raklitz would kindly come to the garret bedroom and see if the bride's dress was just right.

The Pastor's wife was well aware that no one in Värmland knew better how to dress a peasant bride than Ulla Moreus and her Mother-in-law. Still it was polite of them to wish to hear her opinion. So she went with Ulla to the bedroom where the bride stood ready, waiting for the bridesmaids to come and fetch her. They were thinking of nothing here but flowers and finery. It was a real relief to answer questions as to whether the gold chain was hanging as it should, whether they ought to put more bead necklaces on the bride, or whether she really admired the tall crown of cardboard that Ulla Moreus had sat up all night to decorate with red and green silk and gilt paper. They had thought until the very last moment that the old crown would have done again, but late last evening Ulla had remembered that this was the grandest wedding to be held this winter, and then she had cut a new foundation and decorated it.

The Pastor's wife praised it and everything else as well. But old Mother Moreus still looked troubled, and in a little while she confided to the Pastor's wife what was worrying her.

It was very nice that Sister[1] Raklitz was pleased with the wedding-dress, but she felt herself that everything was a failure if they could not induce the bride to look a little happier. There was not much pleasure in decking up anyone who looked after all as if she were going to the gallows.

The bride turned sharply away from them, muttering a few scarcely audible words. All the fine things she wore were nothing to her if Mamsell Maia Lisa was not coming to the wedding! Had she not promised thousands of times that she would come and see her in her wedding-dress?

Then Ulla Moreus put in her word, speaking in the bright, pleasant voice of one who likes to take a matter in hand and settle it all happily. No doubt Maia Lisa could leave her Grandmother for a little while. They would willingly send for her. It wasn't after all a long drive.

And even the old Mother-in-law added a persuasive word as well: Maia Lisa and Britta were schoolfellows, and had been good friends ever since.

The Pastor's wife answered in no very friendly tone. "No doubt, dear Sister, I should think there isn't a single peasant girl in the parish who isn't a good friend of Maia Lisa." She tossed her head, and left the room. No one ventured to say anything more to her. Her face was flaming again by now. They needn't think she did not see that they had only coaxed

[1] An ordinary title of friendly respect amongst Swedish peasants.

her up into the garret to talk about Maia Lisa.

The ceremony was over, and everything had gone well. The bride knew that the guests were all sitting now, talking in whispers of how she had looked. For her parents' and grandparents' sake she could have wished her face had not been quite so tear-stained. If only Mamsell Maia Lisa had come she would have gone through it all with a bright face. The Pastor's daughter had so often said how she would like to see her as a bride ; perhaps it was only to encourage her, but now she thought that the one piece of brightness that she had promised herself to-day had been snatched from her. Whilst the service was going on she had turned her head several times and glanced towards the door, for, in spite of all, she had been so sure Maia Lisa would come that she could not help looking for her. How could anyone be so hard-hearted and refuse her on such a day, the only thing she asked! Her eyes filled with tears at the very thought.

When they had laid the great table, shaped like a horseshoe, and the guests sat down to eat, they began to be very merry and talkative all round her. The others could eat, drink, and joke, but she felt all the time the same sense of oppression. She could not even think of food. She sat crumbling a slice of bread, so that they might think she was eating something. "If only Mamsell Maia Lisa had come to-day," she thought, "it would have been a different matter. She would have made it easy for me."

She looked up at her bridegroom beside her with some confusion, wondering if he had heard anything, for it struck her that she had been thinking aloud. And in a moment she really did; she noticed she was sitting there murmuring: "Oh dear, dear, to think that Mamsell Maia Lisa has never come to my wedding!"

"What are you sitting there, saying to yourself?" asked the bridegroom.

She answered almost against her will, "Oh dear, dear, to think that Mamsell Maia Lisa has never come to my wedding!" The bridegroom remembered very well how he had had to beg and pray before this rich peasant's daughter had consented to take him. Already people began to whisper that she had been forced to it by her grandparents, and if his bride was going to sit at the wedding-feast with such a sad face, the report would soon spread far and wide. He began to reprove her. It wasn't fitting to take it so to heart. She could have the Pastor's daughter another day.

The bride paid no heed to his words. She sat crumbling her bread, and in a little she sighed again: "Oh dear, dear, to think Mamsell Maia Lisa should not see me as a bride!"

Once more her husband tried to reason with her—"How foolish to make a fuss about such a thing," he said. "What do you think Mamsell Maia Lisa troubles about you? We all know how much interest gentlefolk take in us peasants!"

But then the bride turned round sharply: "You wouldn't say that if you knew what you

were talking about. You wouldn't be sitting where you are if the Pastor's daughter had not spoken well of you, and said that she believed you would be good to me."

Now it was the bridegroom's turn to be silent, so silent, indeed, that when the guests sitting opposite wanted to speak to him, they had to shout before he answered.

The other guests could not fail to notice it, and they too grew silent, and did nothing but look anxiously at bride and bridegroom. But just when all were feeling most embarrassed, the young peasant turned to his bride. "If that is all you are troubled about," he said, "it can soon be remedied. I think I am man enough to manage to let Mamsell Maia Lisa see you as a bride."

She looked at him in amazement and saw he was in earnest.

"I will never forget that you cared enough for me to help me in this," she answered. And as she spoke her face brightened, and she seemed a different creature.

. . . . .

The Pastor's daughter was sitting crying before the stove in the kitchen bedroom at Lövdala. The tears were pouring down her cheeks. She simply could not keep them back, although she tried hard to, for she did not want the servants to think she was sitting there crying only because she was left alone at home whilst her dear father and stepmother were away enjoying themselves.

For that wasn't why she was sad; no, indeed; her trouble was that she had not been able to keep her promise to Britta. How often they two had spoken of this great wedding-day! It had never been possible to make Britta quite happy about her bridegroom, but it had always cheered her up when the Pastor's daughter told her that she was looking forward to seeing her in her wedding-dress. How could she help but cry? It was so hard to have had to break her word to Britta.

But how strange it was! She fancied she could hear sleighbells, the tramp of horses' feet, and unmistakable sounds of a violin. The music grew plainer and plainer. Surely she heard something, but where in the world could it come from? She got up and went to the eastern window where she could see right down the avenue.

When she had lit the stove an hour ago it had been dark night outside, but now the wood had burnt out it was dark in the room. And, meanwhile, how light it had grown outside in the clear, bright starlight. The snow on the ground and the white frost on the trees were doing their part too, so that when she reached the window it seemed as though she were looking into a brightly lighted room.

She saw quite plainly a bridal procession coming out from the avenue, and on between the old houses behind the Parsonage. In the first sleigh sat the players with their fiddles under their chins, fiddling away as fast as fingers could go. In the next sat the bride and bride-

groom, and the bride had not even a shawl over her head, but, instead, her crown shining brightly in the white light of the snow. After them came sleigh after sleigh filled with peasant guests. She recognised Sexton Moreus' white horse, the churchwarden's red sleigh, and——

But as she looked she grew so dizzy that she had to sit down on the chair by the window. She could not make out what it was. Why were the wedding-party from Lobyn driving down here to the empty Parsonage? Perhaps she only saw such things because all day long her thoughts had been busy with nothing but this marriage feast.

She heard them stop before the steps, heard the door open and people crowding into the hall. But she sat on just as before. Not that she was afraid, but alas! how heart-breaking it would be to go out to welcome them and find no one there after all!

Now they were in the drawing-room, and now they opened the door into the room next the kitchen. The players came first. Then Sexton Moreus with Ulla on his arm. Next the bride and bridegroom with two bridesmaids each carrying a three-branched candlestick, and after them a whole host of young folks, men and maids.

When they had all come in, Jan Oster and his friend stopped playing, and Sexton Moreus stepped up to the Pastor's daughter and made a little speech. Nothing would satisfy Britta of Lobyn but that the Pastor's daughter should see what a beautiful bride she was, and so she

and her husband had meant to drive over alone, but then he and the others had thought that it would not give her much pleasure to see the bride unless she could see the bridal procession as well, and so they had all come or, at any rate, as many as were not too sleepy after the wedding-dinner.

The Pastor's daughter was always badly dressed since she had had a stepmother. But both she and everyone else forgot all about that in the joy that lit up her face at their coming.

It was true enough what report said of these daughters of Lövdala Parsonage that they had some magic power over people. No one could really understand how she managed it, but when she threw her arms round the bride and shook hands with the bridegroom and all the others, every one of them felt that the real wedding joy had been wanting until that moment. For the Pastor's daughter could throw off her sadness, and be so gay that other people too thought, "There is nothing so beautiful as life; it is untrue to say life is sad and troublous, when it is nothing but unmixed joy."

The Pastor's daughter only had to look at the bride and praise her crown to open their eyes too. They had not noticed before how pretty she was in her wedding-dress. When she turned to the bridegroom with a word of thanks for his coming and congratulated him on his wife, the same thing happened to him. He realised that he had not only married into the largest peasant-holding in Lobyn, but that he had

also got the best peasant girl for his bride. No one could hear what she said to Britta, but Britta's face told plainly enough that it was just what she needed to make her happy for all the rest of the day.

They had brought refreshments which they spread on the table, for they wanted her to taste the wedding-feast. And it was evident how delicious she thought it all was, but she would not eat anything until after they had gone again. She knew, of course, that they could not stay long, the only marvel was that they had managed to get away at all.

Ulla told her how they had watched their opportunity, and crept away immediately after the dinner. The old people had been sitting a little drowsy, needing their after-dinner nap, and had known nothing about it until the young folk had got away. But they must drive back as soon as the bride had danced one turn with Maia Lisa.

They went out into the drawing-room, and took their places round the wall to watch the dance. Fiddler Jan Oster tuned up a polka, and off went the bride with the Pastor's daughter. But in the very first round, Maia Lisa turned pale with anxiety. In her happiness she had quite forgotten about the dance-money. On the wedding-day everyone, old and young, alike, had to dance with the bride, and everyone who danced with her had to give her the dance-money. But she, poor girl that she was, did not possess a single farthing.

The bride had not been so forgetful of her

duty. Away on a table in the corner of the drawing-room she had put a bottle of scent and a bride's box of pastry, raisins and wedding comfits to offer her after the dance.

The Pastor's daughter felt that never before had fate treated her so badly. It would never do to break the old custom, for everyone would think that would bring bad luck.

Britta must have seen her anxiety, for in the midst of the dance she whispered that Mamsell Maia Lisa must just pretend to put something in her hand. Of course she couldn't have any dance-money ready when they had come upon her so unexpectedly.

The Pastor's daughter owned a pair of gold ear-rings and a gold brooch that had been her Mother's before her. She would have liked to give Britta one or other of them, but she did not know if she dared. What would happen if her stepmother chanced to hear of it? It was not unusual to dance more than one round with the bride, but the Pastor's daughter danced two or three, whilst she turned over in her mind what she could do. Not that that quite expresses her feelings, for she was in such terror that her thoughts flew in the wildest confusion.

Whilst she was dancing as slowly as she could, she thought of a silver spoon that had been given to her at her christening. But she was by no means certain that Raklitz would not go to the bride's home the next day and ask for it again if she gave away anything so valuable. "The only thing I can do is to tell Britta she will get her money another time," she said to

herself. But then something happened that startled her, and off she went and finished the round at a good pace. For someone had watched her and slipped a coin into her fingers as she was dancing past. When the dance came to an end she had a whole bright silver thaler to lay in Britta's hand.

The bride was so taken aback that she quite forgot to offer the wedding comfits, and the Pastor's daughter had to ask if she was not to get any. Whilst she helped herself to scent, she looked round to find out who it was that had given her the thaler. She knew she had got it just as she passed the stove. Then it must have been the tall dark man standing between the stove and the cupboard who had helped her.

She bent forward and took some pastry from the box, and as she did so she whispered to the bride that she thought she knew everybody in the parish, but she could not quite recollect the name of the man standing by the cupboard.

The bride answered under her breath that that was not to be wondered at, for that was a man from another parish. He was a smith from the Henriksberg ironworks in Västmarken, and he had just come that day to buy some hay from her Grandfather. She didn't really know why he had come with them, for he wasn't one of the wedding guests. He hadn't even got on his best clothes.

And sure enough the stranger was dressed in black sheepskin with a belt round his waist. The Pastor's daughter wondered how she was to thank him, but she had no chance then, for

the wedding-party were just coming up to say good-bye. She thanked them for coming, helped them on with their wraps, and waved her hand to them from the porch. When she came back to the drawing-room she was a little astonished to find the tall stranger still standing in the middle of the room.

But it soon occurred to her why he had stayed. Of course he wanted to know when he was to get back the thaler that he had lent. Who knows, perhaps he has taken it from the money his master gave him to pay for the hay!

It seemed as though he would like to deny having lent it, and when she persisted, he declared it was nothing worth speaking about.

But she could not consent to take a whole thaler from a stranger. She told him she would ask her Father for it as soon as he came home, and send it over the next morning, so that he could pay for the hay.

A kindly smile crept over his face like a gleam of sunshine. She must do as she liked in the matter, but he had plenty of money to manage, without the thaler.

She looked at him with a little wonder in her glance. Indeed, she began to think he had not stayed for the sake of the money. But why, then?

He stroked a long lock of hair back from his forehead, and looked past her to the other wall. "Oh, I don't know," he said; "perhaps there was something else I wanted to talk about."

The Pastor's daughter with a little feeling of impatience took a step towards the door.

The man looked at her again with his kindly smile. "I cannot understand how the others had the heart to drive away," he said.

The Pastor's daughter flushed and went on towards the door.

"They ought to have taken you with them to the dance, and not have left you all alone here."

There was such a kindly note in his voice that she could not be angry. She turned towards him and laughed. "Oh, it won't hurt me to be left alone, for I am happy now. And you must go as well. Contented as I am, no one need be uneasy on my account."

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOX-PIT

LONG-BENGT was standing with his lantern in his hand very early in the day looking down into the fox-pit. Something was wrong with it, for never in all his life had he seen a pit look like that.

Now, if there was one thing in the world that Long-Bengt knew he could do it was to lay a good fox-trap. And the evening before he had seen to it just as carefully as ever. He had covered the mouth of the deep pit with little birch branches, straw, and snow, and given it such a deceptive roof that not even the sharpest old vixen could tell it from ordinary earth. And the duck that had to sit on the top of the tall pole in the middle of the pit to entice the fox that way had been fastened with a strap over her wings, and fixed so firmly to the post that he knew she could not get away. The best duck in the poultry-yard she was, and had the strongest voice too. He had heard how she quacked when he had left her tied fast to the pole ; her shrill piercing cries of distress had resounded far and wide through the silence of the winter's night. It was a great disgrace for anyone to bait a fox-pit and tie the duck

so insecurely that the fox could run off with her, and one that Long-Bengt had never yet incurred. A disgrace too, equally great, whether the fox got her off to the forest or carried her down to the bottom of the pit as he fell.

The dairymaid never liked giving up her ducks. If any harm should come to one of them, he knew she would taunt him with it every evening that he wanted to set the trap.

Now, however, this mishap had come to pass. When he shone the lantern before him he saw that there was no duck on the post, nothing but the ends of the strap hanging there. He was so annoyed that he turned to go, scarcely caring to see if the fox had fallen into the pit or got clear away. Still it was just possible that he might be a prisoner. He tried to throw the light from the lantern on the ground at his feet. There were holes in several places of the pit-roof. If only he could understand how that fox had managed to drag down so much straw.

But, turn the lantern as he might, he could not possibly see down to the floor of the pit, so he began to look for footsteps on the snow. If there had been two foxes he could better understand why the roof was so broken up, and then, too, it would not be quite such a disgrace to have lost the duck.

He found the foot-marks in the snow, held the lantern close to them, and bent lower and lower. At last he got down on his knees, took the candle out of the lantern, and threw its light to the ground.

When he got up, his legs trembled so beneath

him that he was glad nobody was there to see. He could scarcely get over the ground fast enough to fetch a rope from the stable. When he came back with it, he made the lantern fast to one end, and let it down the pit. Now he could see to the very bottom, and in a moment a broad grin passed over his face. His eyes grew smaller and smaller and brighter and brighter, and his white teeth glistened in the candle-light. Yet he seemed in no hurry, but stood leaning over the pit chuckling to himself.

A little later Long-Bengt came up to the big house. He did not go along the kitchen path, but tramped heavily up to the front door and felt for the locks and bolts to let himself in. It was barely five o'clock, and no one was up but the old housekeeper. She heard the fumbling at the door and, quite startled at the noise, came to open it.

"But why in the world are you here, Long-Bengt? Whatever possesses you to come in the front way?"

Long-Bengt brushed her aside without vouchsafing a word of reply. He went straight to the bedroom where the Pastor and his wife lay in their first sleep, and knocked at the door.

"What is it? What has happened?" And the Pastor sat up in bed.

"It is Long-Bengt, Pastor. I wanted to tell you the duck disappeared from the pit last night."

"That's a bad job, of course, Bengt, but still you needn't come in the middle of the night and——"

"The duck and the fox are both down in the pit."

"You are a duffer, Bengt. You know I came home late from the wedding, and have only just this minute gone to sleep."

But after a respectful pause Long-Bengt went on. "There was a wolf on the fox's track, and he's fallen into the pit as well."

Quick as a flash came the Pastor's answer: "Tell them in the kitchen to come and light up here so that I can get up!"

But Long-Bengt kept his ground as though he were deaf.

"And there was another wolf following the first, and he's in the pit as well." Not a word more, but straight to the door and out.

When the day had really dawned all the Parsonage people had gathered round the fox-pit, the Pastor and his wife, the Pastor's daughter, the housekeeper, the five maids, the old crofter-woman and Little-Maid. Besides these there were Long-Bengt and his Mother, Old Bengta and his wife, Merry Maia, the two Vetter-lads, Player Jons and Old Backman, a soldier who was doing a little work on the Lövdala land. They were all silent, and all leant forward to look down into the pit for a minute or two, and then drew back again.

Little-Maid was standing a little apart, for there was no room for her close to the edge of the pit. The Pastor caught sight of her and beckoned to her to come and look as well as the others.

A minute before she would have liked to

push forward, but now she could not take a step. A shudder went through her, she simply dared not look at the wolves. She had never seen any before, although she had often heard them bark in the forest round Koltorp, and she knew that wolves were the most horrible things in creation, worse even than great serpents.

The Pastor was gayer this morning than she had ever seen him before. He took a good grip of her sheep-skin collar.

"Now I have got you fast, Nora Stormwind, so that you can't fall. You must look down into the pit, even if you are but a child, so that you can tell the young folks when you are an old woman how, in one night, we caught two wolves and a fox in the Lövdala pit!"

So there she stood at the edge and looked down at last. The pit was square and lined with wood like the well, although, of course, much bigger. She looked about for great monsters with gaping jaws that could swallow a little girl like her in one bite. But she could not catch sight of them, so she turned round and looked at the Pastor.

"Look into the corners!" he said. Once again she bent forward. It was pretty dark down there, but now she began to make out something. There were four animals in the pit, one in each corner. All four were perfectly quiet, only their eyes shone brightly when they looked up to the light and the people peering down at them.

In the corner exactly opposite her lay the

fox, a little tight red ball, no larger than a sofa cushion. In the next lay a creature like a great shaggy dog; in the third stood the duck on both legs, straight and dignified. Whilst in the fourth there was another of the great furry dogs.

There was something strange and mysterious in the silence down in the pit. Little-Maid was as silent as all the rest when she stepped back from its edge.

When they had all looked their fill, the men went away in a group to talk it over. They must kill the wolves, but it was not easy to say how it was to be done. It would have been simple enough to shoot them, but if once blood was shed in the pit, it would be quite spoilt; not another creature would ever be caught in it again. When it was only a fox in question, a man used to jump down, give him a knock on the head to make him unconscious, tie a loop round his neck and haul him up. There was no danger in jumping down to a fox, but it was quite another matter to go into a pit with no less than two wolves.

Long-Bengt took the cudgel he generally used to knock the fox senseless, went up to the pit, looked down, shook his head, and went back to the others. One of the Vetter-lads fetched a rope and made a noose of it. He stood on the edge of the pit, and let down his noose straight in front of one wolf. If he could only get the noose over the wolf's head, it would be easy work to pull him up. Down went the noose, lower and lower, right on the creature's

nose, but he never stirred. Then suddenly he tossed his head and snapped. Two rows of teeth shone white, and the noose lay bitten off on the floor of the pit.

Terror filled the hearts of those who saw it. It was no joke to have a tussle with animals who could bite off a rope at one go. "There's no help for it, we shall have to shoot them in the pit," said the Pastor. "Then, of course, we shall have to dig a new pit before next winter."

But now a man who had been standing a little behind the others stepped up to the pit-head. He was no other than the Henriksberg smith who had come up to Lobyn the evening before to buy hay. But in the bride's home so many guests were staying the night that they could not offer him a bed, and Biorn Hindriksson had begged the Pastor to take him in. Well, the bedroom under the Parsonage roof was always ready to offer to strangers, and there he had passed the night. But in the morning everyone's thoughts had been so taken up with the wolves that they had quite forgotten all about him.

He looked down into the pit, then took up Long-Bengt's cudgel and weighed it in his hand. But they all thought he was only doing it for amusement. He was very tall but slight, and did not look so very strong. His hands were slender, too, and white, not in the least like a smith's great fists. He didn't look like a man who had had a specially happy life. His eyes looked as though all the sorrow he had ever

felt had taken refuge there and never been washed away by healing tears, and when he moved he seemed borne down by a cruelly heavy burden, for his step was as slow and dragging as a worn-out wayfarer's.

Now he stood listening to the other men's suggestions for a little time, but when he saw how helpless they were, he jumped, quickly for once, on to the edge of the pit and down right into the very midst of the wild beasts.

Before anyone realised what was happening, swish went the cudgel, and a dull thud was heard. That was one of the wolves who had got a stunning blow on his head, then another and another.

The second wolf had got up, so he had a blow on his back that felled him to the ground, and then came a death-stroke on his skull as well.

"Now down with the rope!" cried the stranger to the others.

Long-Bengt threw a rope with a noose down to him. He drew it over the first wolf's head, then over the other's, and had them both drawn up.

The fox now showed signs of life. He was taking great leaps up the pit walls, but the stranger took no notice of him. "Put down the ladder. The cattle-man can look after the other two," he said.

As he came up both men and women were so amazed that not a word could they say. When he had jumped down, the women had been so terrified that they stood there trembling, and the men were a little ashamed that they had

dared not to do it themselves. But the Pastor's daughter came with shining eyes to meet him.

"Now, indeed, I have seen a true man," she said. "I have longed for this all my life."

He looked at her with his sorrowful eyes. "Everything in the world," they seemed to say, "is poor and worthless, and I myself am worse than all else." But at the same time the kindly smile lit up his face. "I thought it was a pity," he said, "to shoot down into the pit and spoil it."

CHAPTER IX

THE SILVER THALER

IT might be thought that that was nothing to worry over. But in truth the Pastor's daughter had gone about for a couple of weeks feeling quite desperate because she did not know where to get a silver thaler. If only she had asked her father for it the morning after the wedding as she had intended! But she had had a good scolding from her stepmother for what she had said to the smith when he came out of the fox-pit—and not only for what she had said, but for rushing forward as she had done. It had looked just as if she wanted to throw herself on his neck. How much longer would it be before she learnt to behave like a reasonable being and not like a twelve-year-old child?

After that, how could she ask for money? It had been impossible to get her father by himself, and to mention it before her stepmother was only to ask for more reproof and displeasure. Yet it was very tiresome that she had put it off, for next day she could not think of venturing to do it. For then it came to dear Mother's ears that bride, bridegroom, and all the wedding procession from Lobyn

had been at the Parsonage. That wounded her deeply, and how much deeper would the sore have been if she had got to know that Maia Lisa had been audacious enough to give away a whole silver thaler! But the longer the Pastor's daughter put off mentioning the loan, the harder it grew to confess such a serious debt to her father and stepmother. And at last she had to own to herself that she would certainly never have the courage to ask them for money. It could not be helped, she must try to get it some other way.

She thought of it by day as she sat sewing the long seams of the linen sheets and thought of it by night in her bed. Of course, she must pay the smith. She could never endure the shame if she did not repay the loan of one who had so kindly come to her help. If only she could have seen Anna Brogren! But it was quite out of the question. Dear Mother would never let her go to see anyone who loved her.

But to whom else could she turn? Grandmother was as poor as she herself and had nothing but what dear Father gave her. And Ulla Moreus had probably never handled a silver thaler in all his days.

She was indeed terribly worried. It would not do to go to any chance person and say she dared not ask dear Father and Mother for a silver thaler.

When she was almost at her wit's end she happened to remember that she had an aunt who might perhaps come to her help. But alas. She could scarcely help laughing when she

thought of how her aunt would look when she came asking for money. She would be astounded no doubt, for her niece was the greatest stranger possible to her. There was a great impassable gulf fixed between her and Maia Lisa.

Not that there was any enmity between them, but her aunt had in her young days gone and married a rich peasant's son who had been bold enough to woo her. It had by no means been a love match as far as Maia Lisa could hear. He had had a good opinion of himself, and thought it was a fine thing to get a Pastor's daughter for his wife, whilst she had said quite plainly that she would rather be mistress of a well-to-do peasant household than go home and wait for some poor assistant parson.

Ever since her aunt had gone to her peasant home she had, of her own accord, kept away from all her family. She wanted to forget her former life altogether, and she was particularly pleased when no one from Lövdala came near her.

She lived not far away, in the parish of Bro, but she never came to the Parsonage. Instead, Father or Grandmother or Maia Lisa used to drive once a year over to Svanskog and call on her. To be sure Maia Lisa had to own that she had never much enjoyed these visits to the peasant-house. What annoyed her was not that her aunt had in the course of years grown like any other peasant woman, but that she always acted so strangely when anyone came to see her from Lövdala. She never came out to the front steps to bid them welcome, and

when they came into the sitting-room she always made a point of saying that they really should not trouble to come and call at a peasant's house. Then she would at once begin to reckon up how long it was since they had last been there, and that in no spirit of friendliness, but rather in such a way that her visitors felt quite miserable, and wondered if they had done right in coming, or if it would have been better to stay at home.

How tiresome it was! One morning when Maia Lisa was sitting at breakfast with her Father and Mother she ventured to mention her aunt in Svanskog, and to say they must not forget her. The words had scarcely passed her lips than she regretted them. For what good was it for her to go to Svanskog? It would be quite useless, for her aunt was no fonder of her than her stepmother herself. Far from it; so that if Maia Lisa did drive over, she was by no means sure that she would dare to ask for help.

Father looked up at once from his porridge-plate. He had always been sorry for the Pastor's daughter who had married a peasant, and he was very anxious she should know that she was not forgotten in her old home. So now he began to wonder when they had last been to see her, perhaps so long ago that they ought to go and call again.

His wife said not a word, as she had nothing to do with peasant relatives, so Maia Lisa had to answer that no one had been to Svanskog since last Christmas. She was bold enough to

add that no doubt it would please her aunt most if her Father would drive over and take dear Mother to call.

But Maia Lisa soon saw that she was not going to get out of the matter so easily. Her Father leant back in his chair looking anything but pleased; no doubt he thought that there ought to be some limit even to family affection. At last he explained that Aunt Margreta had seen so much of him that there was no need for him to drive over to Svanskog. But Mother and Maia Lisa had better go that very day; in fact, it would fit in excellently, for neither Long-Bengt nor Blackie had anything else to do. And so it was settled before breakfast was finished.

Dear, dear, thought Maia Lisa, how she wished she had bitten off her tongue. Why need she begin talking about Svanskog? Just think of having to sit and drive twelve miles in the same sleigh with her stepmother!

But after breakfast, the Pastor's wife followed her husband into his room, and when she came out everything had been altered again. She said now that it was quite unnecessary for anyone except Maia Lisa to go to Svanskog. It was plain enough she didn't want to go, but it was good for young people to do what they did not like. And she could walk, not drive; for her stepmother wanted Long-Bengt to-day to help her with the tallow-boiling. But the next day he could come and fetch her.

The Pastor's daughter did not dare to betray by look or word whether she was pleased or

sorry. But to herself she thought that, since she must go to Svanskog, she would rather walk by herself than drive in her stepmother's company.

As she was to be away so long, however, she begged that Little-Maid might look after Grandmother now and again and see if she wanted anything.

But dear Mother would most certainly never grant any request of hers, so she at once said that Little-Maid was to go with her to Svanskog. Did Maia Lisa think that her stepmother had so little sense of what was fitting as to let her walk all that way by herself? And she needn't trouble about Grandmother, there were plenty of women about Lövdala to see to her.

As usual, the Pastor's wife had her own way, and in less than an hour the Pastor's daughter and Little-Maid had both started. They walked quietly and steadily down the avenue and on the road as long as they were in sight from the Parsonage windows, but soon they came to the outskirts of the great forest where no one at home could catch a glimpse of them. And although the Pastor's daughter certainly thought the long tramp to Svanskog useless and wearisome, yet it happened to be the most glorious winter weather, and straight down in front of them stretched the long slope of a steep hill, and she was free and independent as she had not been for many a month, and felt like a bird set loose from a tiny cage. So seventeen years stretched out a hand to thirteen, and on they rushed at full speed till they landed

in the great snowdrift at the foot of the slope and lay there helpless with laughter.

When they reached Svanskog it was only one o'clock. They had had the good luck to get a lift for half their journey. All the way from Broby they had driven with a man from Svanskog, who had taken a gentleman so far and brought them back in his empty sleigh.

There was an inn in Svanskog, although not nearly so big as the one in Broby, where a fair number of people were always going and coming. Here in Svanskog, in the far north of the parish, there came at the very most only one traveller in a day, and sometimes indeed a whole week would pass without anyone asking for a sleigh. It was all just as usual here. Neither her aunt nor any of her maids came to help the Pastor's daughter and Little-Maid out of the sleigh.

Dear, dear, how cramped her heart felt, just as if her chest had been tightened up until there was no room for it to beat in! On her way she had been more hopeful, but as she got out of the sleigh she felt sure her aunt would never help her.

Svanskog was a great building, with the entrance in the middle of the longest side, and not poked away in one corner as was usually the case in peasant houses. Outside the front door there was a porch not quite so large as the porch at Lövdala, but with the same kind of roof and pillar supports.

That was really rather strange! Often as the Pastor's daughter had been here she had

never noticed the porch before. She had to stand still for a little and look at it and everything else. The dwelling-house was old, but it had been repaired and altered since her aunt came, and no doubt she must have taken her childhood's home as a model. The windows had the same number of panes here as there, and the round garret skylights might have been moved from one house to the other without anyone noticing the difference.

In a second her heart found a little more room to work in. Perhaps it had, after all, not been such a terrible blunder to come here. Perhaps the former Pastor's daughter had not disappeared so completely as she wanted to make herself and everyone else believe.

The hall was smaller than in Lövdala. But there were the same rounded cupboards in the corners, and the walls, too, were painted grey with an ornamental pattern of black and white dots. The staircase wall had the same rough wooden beams as at home, and the narrow garret steps were just as steep and dangerous. No doubt it was just as easy here as in Lövdala to slide down the handrail from top to bottom without once touching the ground.

Exactly opposite the entrance there was a door leading into a large room kept sacred to visitors. None of the household were ever to be found there, but the Pastor's daughter turned the key and peeped in. She saw exactly what she expected: the very same chairs of yellow birch wood and the table with flaps as in the Lövdala drawing-room; there was even the

great arum lily by the one window. Yet one thing was a little different, for although the carpet stripes were blue as at home they were not of the same pattern. But it struck Maia Lisa that this was not her aunt's fault. She had copied in her weaving the old carpet patterns of her childhood. It was the Lövdala household who had altered the stripes.

The Pastor's daughter closed the door and stood silently in the hall. Tears had filled her eyes, but she did not think her aunt would care for such a sign of affection, so she would go in looking calm and cheerful.

It was Maia Lisa's usual luck again! When she opened the door to the great living-room she saw her aunt was busy washing. A great boiler was hanging over the fire, and a washing-tub full of clothes stood in the middle of the floor with a little stream of soap-suds trickling out of it. Of course, her aunt would be more vexed than ever at her visit. There was a good deal of water spilt about the room, and a long bench stood covered with the coarse newly washed clothes. Maia Lisa could quite understand that no one would care about receiving guests in such a disorderly place.

There was nothing to remind her of Lövdala in this quite ordinary peasant room. Maia Lisa had always thought of it as a great dignified place, with the high cupboards right up to the ceiling, the enormous four-poster bed, and the long benches fastened against the walls. But the wet clothes had taken away every bit of comfort and dignity now.

Her aunt was standing at a washing-tub with her back to the door, rubbing and scrubbing with all her might. Maia Lisa had often heard that her mother and all her sisters had been tall and slight like herself, but her aunt was a great strong woman, by no means slim. She had on her black homespun skirt with a red corslet and white top. Whilst she was working, she had thrown off the short white sheepskin that completed her costume.

She did not turn towards the door when they opened it, nor speak one word. Maia Lisa wished herself many miles away, and no mistake. But there was no help for it ; she had to go up to her and offer to shake hands. Her aunt had both hands in the water. She drew one out, and, without troubling to dry it, put it into her niece's outstretched fingers.

" Oh, so it's you that have come at last," she said. " I suppose the Pastor's new wife is too grand to call on us peasant folk."

She said really nothing worse than that, and did not speak more unkindly than usual, but Maia Lisa could not have been so long-suffering as she generally was, for she burst into tears. Maybe she took it so to heart because she had come a-begging, and felt now that she would never dare to utter her request.

It only needed this flow of tears to make her utterly miserable. Oh dear, dear, how could she let herself go like that before this aunt who had never cared for her ! And it was not like one or two tears, that were easily wiped away. But down they came, pouring over her cheeks,

whilst there was such a lump in her throat that she could not utter a word.

How bitterly ashamed she was of herself. She cried because she was crying, and when one gets to that pass there is no end indeed to the tears. She would have liked to rush away, and go home again that very moment. She did get as far as the door, but when she got there she felt so weak that her knees gave way under her, and she sank down on to a short little bench standing by.

She pictured to herself all the time what her aunt must think of her coming in crying and disturbing her in the middle of her washing. Not that she seemed particularly uneasy. She left off rubbing the clothes, but took time to empty a bucket of hot water into the wash-tub and put a couple of logs on the fire before she came to her.

"You needn't take it so much to heart," she said; "maybe my bark is worse than my bite."

But if she thought that would dry her niece's tears, she was much mistaken. They came from such a deep and overflowing source of sorrow that once they began to flow they must go on for hours.

The Pastor's daughter could not answer a word, although she knew very well that her aunt would lose patience and need to go and look after her washing. But Fru Margreta did not seem at a loss, but turned to Little-Maid, who had stood all the time beside Mamsell Maia Lisa and was now timidly stroking her one hand.

" Perhaps you can tell me what she is crying for ? She surely is not upset because I had no time to shake hands properly ? "

Her voice sounded as though she wanted to laugh at the whole matter, and Little-Maid must have noticed it, for in a moment she was furious.

" No wonder she cries when you treat her like that. Here she comes to get help from her mother's very own sister, and you have never a kind word to say to her."

The Pastor's daughter put her hand hastily over Little-Maid's mouth, but it was of no use, for Little-Maid could not endure seeing Mamsell Maia Lisa cry without turning into a very determined little stormwind indeed.

Fru Margreta was not apparently vexed with Little-Maid, but her answer came in fretful tones as she said slowly in a much broader dialect than before : Whatever could she do for Maia Lisa, who lived in such luxury at Lövdala that she could certainly need no help from a poor peasant woman ?

Nothing she could say would have been more likely to set off Little-Maid. " No doubt you are cut out of the same piece as her stepmother," she said. " If you hadn't been I would have told you that she came here to ask you for a——"

But now the Pastor's daughter seized her arm so sharply that she stopped. But Fru Margreta went on as though nothing had been said.

" Can it be so hard for Maia Lisa to have got

a stepmother? The saying goes that whoever gets a stepmother, gets a stepfather too, but it can't have been so with her. Is it possible that there is anything she wants to have and can't get?"

The Pastor's daughter was making all possible signs to Little-Maid, but what use were they when her aunt sat there egging her on like that?

"You can see for yourself how things are with her," said Little-Maid, "if you have any eyes to see with. Her clothes are not much better than mine, and she is nothing but skin and bone. People say blood is thicker than water, but yours isn't, I know. Not a scrap would you care if her stepmother plagued her to death."

What a misery this all was for Mamsell Maia Lisa; it was bad enough not to be able to conquer her tears, but ten times worse to hear her aunt entice Little-Maid to talk of all kinds of things. Who knew how her aunt would take it all? Maybe she really disliked her sister's daughter, and would be glad at what she heard.

She could bear it no longer. She got up and stumbled towards the door. But there was something wrong with the latch when she tried to lift it. She could not get it up at once, and as she pushed and pulled her strength gave way, her head swam, and she fell to the ground.

When she came to herself again she was lying in a bed in the room with the blue-striped pieces of carpet, lying too on such soft pillows and fine linen sheets as scarcely had their equal in Lövdala. By the bedside stood a table

with a tray, and on the tray a dish covered with a white cloth.

She did feel a little hungry, so she hastened to take the cloth from the dish. But there was nothing to eat under it, only a great, beautiful, shining silver thaler.

At first she did not know what it all meant, but then she understood well enough. Her aunt had wormed the truth out of Little-Maid. She felt so happy and so grateful that she began to cry again, and after a few tears she fell asleep.

She slept straight on till the great clock in the living-room struck three. When she looked round, the silver thaler was gone, and in its place all kinds of good food by the bed. At first she felt frightened at the loss of the thaler, but then she consoled herself with the thought that she was in good hands now. When she had eaten the food, she was so overcome with gratitude for all the kindness shown her that once again her eyes filled with tears, and once more she cried herself to sleep.

When next she woke it was dark night. A fire was burning in the stove, and her aunt was sitting by the bed watching her.

The first thing she said was that Maia Lisa must excuse her having taken the liberty to send the silver thaler to the young man who had lent it. A post sleigh had gone over to Henriksberg that afternoon, and the driver had been told to find out which of the smiths had been at Christmas to buy hay in Lobyn. He was to give him the thaler with many

thanks from the Pastor's daughter. She thought that that was the best plan, for it was not so easy for Maia Lisa to send a messenger all the way from Svartsjö right up to Henriksberg.

Once more the Pastor's daughter was so overcome with gratitude that she could scarcely speak. Her aunt, however, would not let the tears come again, but began to ask instead all kinds of questions about Lövdala. She did not speak about her stepmother or anything worrying, but only about things she could not mind. How was her grandmother? Did she keep her room in the brewhouse still as nicely as she used to? And how about Old Bengta and the men's room? Was it as dirty as ever? And were there still owls in the garret? and did the thrush still perch on the top of the pine by the Resting-Stone and sing away on spring evenings? And were the lilies of the valley still growing in the birch-wood behind the orchard? Was the old barn still standing? and was the new parsonage-house that Maia Lisa's father had put up exactly like the old one? And were the sheep still kept in the dark old sheep-house?

The Pastor's daughter lay there listening in utter astonishment. There was nothing that her aunt forgot to ask about. As last she spoke a little about herself. "I must tell you that when I was first married I went home to Lövdala as often as ever I could. I saw that the Svanskog people did not like it, but still I went to ease my heart, for to begin with, I did not settle

down very well here. You can understand that it wasn't very easy for me. My mother-in-law disliked me as your stepmother does you. And there was someone else, too, who was very stern and hard. We were not so fond of one another as we have grown since, and that was the hardest burden of all. But then I noticed that every time I went to Lövdala, the harder it was to come back again. And at last I had to take myself in hand and ask what I really meant to do. This was the place I had chosen for my home, and here I had to live. It was really foolish of me to spoil my life by longing for what I had left behind. I made up my mind never again to go to Lövdala, nor to have anything more to do with the Lövdala people. I would cut myself quite off from my old life. And it really was best for me, for after that I grew happier myself and the others changed too towards me when they saw that I really meant to belong to them.

"You can guess that they watched me when you came to call. But they saw and understood that I did all I could not to be friendly with you.

"Yes, indeed, I had built such a strong wall between you and me that I thought nothing on earth could break it down. But I hadn't ever thought that a Pastor's daughter from Lövdala would one day come to me, little and weak as I was myself at her age, and ask for my help. Then, you see, all my strength gave out.

"But you must not think either that your

coming will make things disagreeable for me at home. Do you know what I did just now when you were asleep? Well, I just took hold of my husband's shirt-sleeve and brought him to the door to peep at you. And then I told him all about it, and asked if he had any objection to my helping you. And I will tell you what he said: 'The little maid lying in there is so like what you were yourself when you first came to me, so like she is, that if there is anyone who won't be good to her and help her, I'll let him hear of it, that I will.'"

CHAPTER X

THE PASTOR FROM FINLAND

MAIA LISA fancied she must be bewitched, for do what she would she could not forget her stepmother. All morning she had been in her thoughts, and although she knew she was fully occupied making her candles at Lövdala, she started involuntarily every time the door opened, for fear lest dear Mother should step in and see how badly she was behaving.

Just imagine if Fru Raklitz had known she was still asleep at eight o'clock that morning, and, worse still, that her aunt had been so kind as to bring her a cup of coffee in bed, although all coffee-drinking was forbidden by His Majesty the King. What a shock for dear Mother who insisted so that all rules and regulations must be obeyed! How her cheeks would flame at the very idea!

Or imagine either if she could have seen how Maia Lisa's aunt left her work all day to sit on the bench between the window and the parlour table and chat with her! Or if she could have heard her aunt laugh as her niece talked about her stepmother and all her doings! For now that Maia Lisa was rested she was no longer

a cry-baby, but ready to make a joke of all her troubles. No doubt dear Mother had expected that this aunt would treat Maia Lisa as she did herself. How annoyed she would have been if she could only have seen how mistaken she was.

But indeed it would not have been such a terrible mishap if the Pastor's wife had burst upon Maia Lisa when she was alone with her aunt. Had she come a little later in the day, it would have been far worse.

In the middle of the morning a traveller came driving into the inn-yard. Maia Lisa turned quickly to the window and saw a tall, fine-looking man getting out of a little green sleigh. He was dressed in a suit of homespun so light that it was almost white, and he was wearing no fur, but that apparently was from choice, for it was evident from the frank and hearty way in which he shook hands with the peasant host that he was a gentleman. Her aunt was so accustomed to strangers that she never troubled to turn her head until Maia Lisa begged her to look out of the window and tell her who the handsome man was.

Fortunately her aunt could answer her inquiry. The stranger outside was, to be sure, no one but the minister from Finnerud, Pastor Liliecrona.

The Pastor's wife ought to have been there to see how Maia Lisa started when she heard the stranger's name. Even her aunt noticed it with some curiosity, but that did not matter, for Maia Lisa was quite pleased to tell her about

the magic pancake and her dream. It would have been utterly impossible to tell such a tale to her stepmother, who would only have tossed her head in contempt at the folly of it all.

But her aunt, on the other hand, took it all in dead earnest. "It wouldn't be so much amiss for you if you could get him," she said. "He is not only good-looking, but a real fine fellow as well."

Maia Lisa sat in utter astonishment. Surely her aunt never meant that she could marry the Pastor of Finnerud. Why, that parish lay right away in the north, farther away even than Västmarken. And nobody lived there but Finns who had gone there two or three hundred years ago, and couldn't even speak Swedish. Finnerud seemed as outlandish to Maia Lisa as if it were in farthest confines of Lapland.

But her aunt set her mind at rest. She needn't be afraid of having to live in Finnerud, for, although Pastor Liliecrona had worked there for eleven years, he was probably leaving now and going to the living of Sjöskoga. Then Maia Lisa began to understand why her aunt was so eager over the matter. She had not been a Pastor's daughter in her young days without knowing very well that Sjöskoga was the best living in the district.

But Finnerud or Sjöskoga were all one to Maia Lisa; her husband would have to be the Pastor of Svartsjö and live in Lövdala.

"Yes, so you say now; but when the right man comes, you'll not trouble about either parish or house."

And so seriously was it said that Maia Lisa had to turn and look out of the window once again. Yes, indeed the Pastor was very handsome, with his broad shoulders and his bright blue eyes. He spoke too in a clear, pleasant voice that could be heard quite well indoors. His host stood listening to him with a pleased look on his face, whilst the men hurried from stall and barn to unyoke his horse.

"Look how they come from every nook and cranny. It is plain enough who it is, for they are all fond of the Finnerud Pastor. Evidently he is going to stay a little instead of going on at once, so you will get a chance to speak to him."

Scarcely had the words left Fru Margreta's lips than the door opened and the Pastor came in.

As he crossed the threshold he called out to her that his host had told him to go into the grand drawing-room, but he had no wish to sit by himself, so would Mother Margreta object to his joining her in the parlour? He would perhaps have to wait some long time in the inn, for his brother, the foreman at Henriksberg, had made an appointment with him here but had not come. He did not know what he wanted, for he had only heard last night by a special ski messenger and had not started till early in the morning, so that his brother ought really to have got there first.

As his words came pouring out, Fru Margreta went to welcome him, and Maia Lisa fancied she was as pleased to see him as the men out-

side. At last her aunt got in a word to tell him he might sit in the parlour as long as he liked. He would not be coming there many more times. She must congratulate him on the great promotion he was getting, although it would be a sad loss to her not to see him any more.

He made an impatient gesture. "I don't know what to do, Mother Margreta. I think I'll refuse it altogether. But what the—— No, no, that's not the right word for a Pastor's tongue."

The cause of his sudden exclamation was neither more nor less than that he had caught sight of the Pastor's daughter. She had been sitting all the time on the window-seat and he had only just noticed her.

Maia Lisa was not a little taken aback when he went on to ask in his clear voice: "What dainty thing is this that you have got in your house, Mother Margreta?" Fru Margreta explained who she was, but he did not behave any more properly for her answer.

He could well believe that she was one of the beautiful daughters of the Lövdala parsonage. How glad he was to get a sight of her at last, after the many times he had begged Mother Margreta to invite him to meet her niece, so that he might know if what people said of her was true.

Maia Lisa was not only taken aback, but really frightened. It wasn't fitting to sit and listen to such things. If her stepmother—— But true! Her stepmother was busy making candles in Lövdala. Her aunt evidently saw her dis-

tress and tried to turn his glances in another direction.

Surely he was never thinking of refusing Sjöskoga ? she said. He ought to be glad at his age to have the offer of important work like that. She had been told that as a rule it was only old men who managed to get such a fat living !

He shrugged his shoulders. He had never meant to go there. Fortune had been too kind to him, for he was quite content where he was.

But surely he had applied for it ?

Oh yes, all his relatives were to blame for that, for they had driven him to it.

He had forgotten Maia Lisa by now as completely as if she had never been there at all. He was thinking of his own affairs as he walked up and down the room with hasty steps and knitted brow. He had a long lock of hair over his forehead which he continually seized and pushed straight up on end only to let it fall down again. He did not seem to be at all satisfied himself with his appearance, although for her part she was obliged to own that he looked equally well whatever he did.

At last he stopped in front of Fru Margreta and asked if he might beg for some advice. He had turned the matter over in his mind so often that by now he did not know right from wrong.

At this, Maia Lisa got up. She thought she had no right to sit there listening to his secrets. But he was one of those people who have eyes in the back of their head. And no sooner

did he notice her than he begged her to stay where she was. It was such a pleasure to have something beautiful to look at.

But she had already grown so accustomed to him that she never even blushed. And indeed there was no reason to feel abashed, for she saw plainly enough that he only looked upon her as a beautiful doll, and it certainly never occurred to him for a single moment that the doll could have both ears and thoughts of her own.

When he began to talk with her aunt he sat down on the edge of the broad table with his back to the Pastor's daughter, so that she thought she was far from his mind, but at that moment he got astride on a chair and fixed his eyes on her face.

Well, to begin with, he wanted to ask Mother Margreta if she had heard what a great deal of trouble he had caused the folk in Finland ever since he went there. Did she know that the very first time he had preached in the church at Finnerud the old Finn men and women had sat there wondering what misdeed he could have committed to be sent up to them?

Fru Margreta had her answer ready, but he gave her no time to speak. Yes, it really was a fact that they had done so, and perhaps not quite without some show of reason. They knew what a house they had to offer their Pastor and how much stipend he got, and they knew well enough they could not expect any Pastors except those no one else wanted. And then when they saw him——

The fine-looking man stopped short, quite at a loss how to go on, but Fru Margreta finished the sentence for him.

"They certainly thought the Pastor was too young and too good-looking to come to them."

He started off again at full speed. Oh well, they saw he wasn't a hundred years old, and although they didn't understand what he said in his Swedish tongue, yet they heard that he could both talk and sing. They agreed, these old men and women, that he was one who ought to be living in a parsonage with lofty rooms and large windows, and that he would never have come up to them if there had not been something wrong with him.

"Perhaps it wasn't very easy to think anything else?"

No, that was just why. And no sooner did one of them go down over the Swedish border to sell bear hides and sheep skins than they told him to be sure and find out what was wrong with the Pastor.

And Pastor Liliecrona jumped up from the chair and paced up and down the room. Evidently he was still excited about it after all these years. But Fru Margreta only laughed and asked if their messenger had found out anything.

Ah, what were they likely to find? When they came back, they knew nothing more than that he had been sent up to Finnerud at his own request.

But the old Finn men and women stuck

to their own opinion. It was, of course, impossible to believe that he had come to them because they were desolate and neglected and parted from their own people. There must be some other reason.

"You see, Pastor, they are so clever up in Finnerud! You mustn't expect too much of them."

But now when they had heard quite certainly that he had done nothing wrong, they had to believe it. But they were not satisfied until they had hit upon an explanation to suit them. No doubt he had only come up to them to get a little practice in his calling. He would certainly go elsewhere as soon as he felt a little more at home in the pulpit.

"And they were not right in that either?"

"No, that they weren't, for I have been there now eleven years." And he added with an angry laugh, "But even now they must needs puzzle their heads over me. There isn't a better-born man in the parish, and if I had grumbled over my loneliness, that they would have understood. Or if I had shut myself up in the Parsonage with only my books for company, that they would have understood too. But a Pastor who was out and about and content to associate with Finn peasants! A Pastor who wanted to know how they cultivated their boggy lands, or how they burnt their clearings, and a Pastor who went hunting with them, was indeed, beyond their understanding."

Now he was astride the chair again and twisted it half round so that he sat eye to eye

with Maia Lisa. But he went on speaking to her aunt.

When he had been some years in Finnerud he began one Sunday to preach in Finnish. And every creature had been so touched that there wasn't a dry eye in the church, and it certainly did not occur to anyone to question his motives before the service was over. But, once out of the church, they had begun in the same old way again. Whatever reason had the Pastor for speaking in Finnish? They went to Peter, the Pastor's man, and questioned him. Had he understood that the Pastor was wanting another living? Peterkin, however, had never noticed but what his master was quite content to live in an ordinary Finn hut with only one room and a fire without a chimney, so that a hole had to be made in the roof to let out the smoke. So they went their way, not understanding any better than before. It was no wonder he got tired of such things, was it?

The Pastor must remember, said Fru Margreta, "that we down here have not always been very pleasant to strangers."

But not to understand such a simple matter as that their Pastor wished them well! They would have been quite pleased if he had gone with a long face grieving that he had to waste the best years of his life amongst poor Finn peasants. It made them quite uneasy to see him content and happy.

One year he told some of the Finn children to come to him and learn Swedish, so that they would not be so helpless as their fathers

when they went to the Swedish courts or markets. But when the old Finns heard the children begin to talk Swedish the same distrust awoke again. So, straight they went to Peter. Perhaps the Pastor wanted more money? But Peter told them he had never heard but what the pastor was satisfied with pay no better than the wages that a Swedish peasant would pay his farm-hand. Peterkin was the only one up there with a grain of sense.

It had been just the same tale when he taught the Finn women how to grow flax. He had gone with them, planted it, hackled it and teased it. But when they had got so far as to have their own flax to spin in their huts their old suspicions came back. Why had the Pastor taught them how to grow flax? They could not possibly understand, so they were obliged to apply to Peterkin again. The Pastor, they supposed, was not wanting a fresh road up to his house? But Peter answered that his master was content with the road he had, although it was so rough and full of holes that it was scarcely possible for a horse to get up it except when it was covered with snow and ice.

Well yes, Mother Margreta could well understand how annoying all that was. Perhaps that was why he had tried for something else?

It had had something to do with it, for he had been so vexed at never being able to win their confidence. But the chief reason had been that his mother and all the family had so

overwhelmed him with entreaties. They, indeed, had been just as impossible to deal with as the Finn peasants. They were for ever writing to him that he was wasting his life, and urging him to try for a living farther south whenever a fairly good one fell vacant. They had worn him out with their arguments, of course, but he had paid no heed, for he wanted to do his duty. Then when Sjöskoga——

He stopped short and went and stood straight in front of the Pastor's daughter. "Of course," he said thoughtfully, looking at her, "I could never get such a wife as this if I stayed in Finnerud."

It was plain enough that he admired her beauty, but nothing more. He looked at her as he would have looked at a painted picture. Not even her stepmother could have found any tenderness in the long glances he fixed upon her.

And in another second he was telling of his troubles again.

When the old rural dean Cameen of Sjöskoga had followed his wife and died last summer, leaving his post vacant, it had struck him that he might apply for it. He thought he might as well please his mother by sending in his application, as there was no chance of its leading to anything. Sjöskoga had always been given to some old professor or head of a school who petitioned the King directly for it. And besides, he rather wanted to see how they would take it in Finnerud. But, after all, it was mostly a little feeling of mischief that sent him down to Karlstad with his testimonials.

He hesitated many a time on the way. Perhaps he would only be laughed at ; a chaplain from Finnerud was certainly taking a good deal on himself in applying for a great living like that. Yet, as he was on the way, he thought he would go as far as Karlstad, and not hand in his papers until he saw who else had applied.

The journey took longer than he had expected, and he only reached the town just an hour before the closing of the application list. He had barely time to stable his horse and hurry up to the Consistory Court.

As he climbed the steps, however, he was so overcome with remorse that he determined to go back again. But the registrar was a special friend of his, and as he was there anyway, he would just step in and see him. He need not mention Sjöskoga, but say he had come down to Karlstad to see his mother.

No sooner had he put his head round the door than the registrar exclaimed : " Someone at last to apply for Sjöskoga. I have been expecting you ever since the living has been vacant."

At first he thought his friend was only joking, so he answered that he had come to town to meet his mother. How could he imagine he was thinking of Sjöskoga ? He was not so far left to himself as not to know that His Majesty the King would give Sjöskoga to some old learned divine from Upsala or Lund.

" I should think you are all of that opinion,"

said the registrar. "You are all so modest that no one ventures to apply. But times are changed since the last King's death. I was delighted when you came in, for I have only had two applications. We must have one more at any rate, so out with your papers."

In this way he had been enticed into leaving his application. When he got home, for a few days he wondered if it would be successful. But he was soon busy with his usual occupations and had forgotten the whole matter, when one day he had a communication from the Consistory. He was third on the select list, and in a few weeks he was to come to Sjöskoga for his trial sermon.

It was no pleasure to him—no, not for a moment—indeed, he would have liked to withdraw his application, but he did not do so because he had no wish to have it said that he was afraid to preach in a parish where there were so many rich peasants and gentlefolk. As Mother Margreta knew, he came of an old Pastor's family, and did not want people to think he was unworthy of his father and grandfather. So he went and preached whilst his hearers sat and listened devoutly. But he did not know what they were thinking. He was glad to get home again and feel that that was, no doubt, the end of the whole matter. But just before Christmas he received an intimation that all had gone well and that he had been chosen unanimously.

He said this in such distressed tones that Fru Margreta could not help laughing.

If he really didn't want to go, he could withdraw.

That was exactly what he had tried to do, but then the bishop himself wrote urging him not to refuse. There was every prospect of his nomination being confirmed. His mother, too, got word of the matter, and wrote begging and praying him not to throw away such a piece of good fortune. And not only his mother, but his brothers, his sisters, and even his cousins. He had not known until then how many relations he had.

Well, and they were right too, of course. You cannot be——

He interrupted her as he almost ran across the room and pressed his clenched fist against his forehead in a kind of almost comic despair. Then there were those blessed Finn peasants. Did Mother Margreta know what they had taken into their heads to do? As soon as they heard that he might be going to move they had cut timber in the forest and driven it up to build him a new house. They had not actually increased his stipend in money, but they had done it in another way. One day a fine elk skin lay in his sledge, another time he found a tub of butter outside his door. They said not a word, indeed, when they met him, but when he was in the pulpit, young and old fixed their eyes on him, so that he knew they were every one of them thinking: "Surely you will not forsake us. If you do, far better you had never come."

So, at last he knew that they wanted to keep

him. He stepped up to Fru Margreta, sat down beside her and took her hard, toil-worn hand in his. "Now think, Mother Margreta," he said in such an earnest, tender voice that both she and Maia Lisa felt their eyes fill with tears, "suppose anyone came and told you that you could move to a great fine estate on condition that you left this home and all you had held dear here all your life! What would you do then?"

But no one heard what Mother Margreta meant to answer, for Maia Lisa could not possibly restrain herself any longer. She rushed up to the Pastor with flaming cheeks, and in a voice trembling with eagerness cried out that most certainly he must stay in Finnerud. Why should he go to Sjöskoga? No doubt they could get along well enough without him there. But when he had done so much for the Finn peasants, how could he ever dream of leaving them?

She would have said a good deal more if someone had not just chanced to come to the door. Then she came to herself again, and although it was not her stepmother but only one of the maids, she stopped short in confusion and would not go on.

But the young Pastor understood what she meant. He jumped up and came towards her with outstretched arms. He looked as though he wanted to clasp her to his heart, but he only took both hands and pressed them between his own. "Mamsell Maia Lisa, dearest Mamsell Maia Lisa," he said very earnestly, "Mam-

sell Maia Lisa, you are the very first of my own position to believe that I am doing any good up there. I thank you with all my heart. Indeed, indeed, I will——"

He stopped short just as the promise was on his lips. The words died unuttered, his hands twitched, and as the Pastor's daughter looked up at him in astonishment she noticed that every feature was contorted with the deepest suffering. He turned away, went down the room, and came back to bend over her as he said in a voice half inaudible from strong emotion: "I will refuse it if I can. If I am not able, it is Mamsell Maia Lisa's fault."

CHAPTER XI

THE SMITH FROM HENRIKSBERG

ALL that day there was but one short hour when Maia Lisa forgot her stepmother, and that was in the evening when she sat with Pastor Liliecrona and all the household round the great log fire in the living-room listening to the tall dark smith from Henriksberg, as he leant against one of the cupboards playing on the master's fiddle.

It was so pleasant then that Maia Lisa thought she understood how her aunt could feel content to be a peasant's wife. It was so wonderfully comfortable in the evening to sit round the fire in the midst of one's servants, all busy with their work and all cheerful and ready for a chat. Master and man, mistress and maid, all talked together here as if there were no distinction between them. Was there after all any special happiness in living as gentlefolk and trying to be thought grander than other people? Did such a life bear in the end any better fruit than loneliness and sorrow?

Where is there such safety and comfort as in an old peasant home? Maia Lisa felt they

were nearer nature there than anywhere else, that their life was built on stronger foundations, and not exposed to so many dangers as other people's. Think what change and how many dangers in the world outside! Now whilst the dark-haired smith was playing, her thoughts went back to what she had heard that day about the manager of Henriksberg, the man who had once been such a wonderful violin player.

It was Pastor Liliecrona who had told her about his brother. He had been expecting him at Svanskog all day long, and no doubt that was why they happened to talk so much about him.

Maia Lisa had had the comfort of knowing that the handsome Pastor who at first had only looked upon her as a beautiful doll had scarcely spoken a word to anyone else ever since the moment when she had, so to speak, fallen upon him and told him that he must stop in Finnerud and not even dream of moving to Sjöskoga.

He must then have seen that she was a human being like himself, for after that he had not troubled to look at her, but had talked to her instead the whole afternoon; and very pleasant it had been, for he was as kindly as he was unaffected and simple-hearted. She found it quite as easy to talk to him as to her own dear father.

He had taken her out with him in the afternoon, for he never could sit indoors hour after hour, and they had walked up and down the

high road talking of his brother, until the day began to draw in.

Liliecrona came of generations of pastors no less than she did, and could boast that his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had all followed one another in the same rural deanery just as she prided herself that her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother had been the wives of successive pastors of the same church.

If his father had lived, the youngest son, Sven, would, no doubt, have studied for the ministry as his brothers had done before him. But when his mother was left a widow with a large family to provide for, she had not been able to keep him at school. But an old friend of her husband's, Herr Altringer, the owner of the Ekeby ironworks, had offered to take charge of him on condition that he might bring him up as an engineer. His offer was most gratefully accepted, and when Sven was fourteen years old he was sent to the Henriksberg works, which Herr Altringer had just bought. Herr Altringer wished him to learn his business from the very beginning, so he was set to sweep the office, drag coal into the smithy, and run errands for all and sundry.

Sven was kept at these tasks till he was seventeen, but then one day the works manager was informed that one of the forge workers was very ill. He went down to the workshops, stood in the doorway of the smith's room, looked at the sick man for a moment, and then went straight to the office where the foreman

was sitting writing. "You must look after the works for a couple of days," said the manager. "I have to go off to the Finns and buy in coal."

So off he went whilst the foreman took a comfortable seat on the office sofa, and thought it was a fine thing to be master for a little. But it was not very long before he, too, was called down to the workshops. Now it was one of the other workmen who was attacked in the same way as the hammer smith. The foreman went down at once to visit the invalid, stood awhile on the threshold of his room looking at him, and went straightway to the stream where the apprentice lad was generally to be found fishing for bleak.

And sure enough he found Sven there and asked him to come to the office. "Look here, Liliecrona," he said, "the manager is away and I have been invited to a friend's at a distance, so you must just manage to look after the works for a couple of days. Here are the keys and the cash-box; all you have to do is to see that the men go on with their work as usual." With that he went off and the apprentice lad sat down on the office chair and thought how fine it was to be master of Henriksberg. But he had not sat there long before a message came from the works that the sick men were worse. He tore down to the main building and went into the hammer smith's room. He did not stop on the threshold, however, like the other two, but stepped up to the sick man as he lay there with a flushed and swollen face terrible to look at. "Do you know what is the matter with

you?" he asked the smith. "Smallpox," came the answer; "and now you must go to the cupboard in the office where the manager keeps his drugs and get me some camphor and salicylic, that is if you dare stop and not run away like the others."

And Sven had stopped, although, to end with, he had nearly all the workmen down with smallpox. Not a word came from either manager or foreman, and there was not a doctor to be found for sixty miles round. He went round with the old housekeeper and gave the sufferers all the remedies he had. Some died and some got better. But as the epidemic could not go on for ever, they saw the end of it at last. Then everything fell back into the usual routine. The foreman enjoyed himself for five months, and then came back, whilst the manager took a good half-year to buy in his coal before he, too, made his appearance again. Then the apprentice lad had to sweep out the office and catch bleak in the stream as he had done before.

But although the Henriksberg works lie in an out-of-the-way place enough, the story crept out and spread far and wide. So one day, the master, Herr Altringer, came on a visit. Not a word did he say of the matter either to the manager or the foreman, but simply asked how young Liliecrona was getting on. The manager gave him a very good character. He believed the lad would make a fine engineer if only he would show a little more interest in the work. He was not without ability, but

inclined to go about dreaming, as though nothing in the business was any concern of his. Herr Altringer asked them to send him to the office, and when he came, he looked him straight in the eyes and asked why he had not run away like the others when the smallpox came.

Sven answered never a word, only flushed up as though that was the very worst question he could ask. "Weren't you afraid?" "Well, yes, I was." "Did you think you were responsible for the works?" "No, not that." But at last Herr Altringer got at the truth. Sven had stopped because the manager's violin had been left hanging on the office wall, and he had been able to play on it every day whilst he was alone. "I see," said Altringer; "so you like playing the fiddle. We'll ask the manager to lend you his violin once again, and you shall play us a tune."

And Sven was not afraid of that. He tuned up and played a simple little air that he had learnt from the smiths. At first Herr Altringer laughed, but he soon grew serious when he noticed that the lad put something into his music that made the poor old fiddle sing in quite another way. "See now," he said, "tomorrow you shall come with me. You shall go to Stockholm and learn to play the violin."

Maia Lisa thought it a charming story, but there was just one thing that worried her. Why was he back again now in Henriksberg? Hadn't he been successful in Stockholm?

Successful, yes indeed. For five years he had

studied there until he was a perfect master of his art, or at least had learnt so much that no one in the country could teach him any more. Herr Altringer was pleased with him, and wondered if he should send him abroad so that he might be equal with the very best.

But three years ago Sven had come over quite unexpectedly to Ekeby to ask Herr Altringer if he had a foreman's place empty in any one of his many ironworks. "Well, it's not impossible," said Altringer. "Have you a friend that you want to put in?" No; Sven wanted to get the post for himself. He had been in ironworks so many years that he thought he could fill a foreman's place. "And how about the music?" It was all over with the music. He did not think he would ever touch a bow again.

Altringer looked at him more closely. Sven had always had a touch of sadness in his eyes, but now his whole body was the very picture of grief. "I see something serious has happened," said Herr Altringer. "You must tell me what it is, for just as you came into the office I was thinking over my plan of letting you go abroad."

Sven could scarcely answer. He stood biting his lip and fighting hard to steady his voice. "Have you not heard, sir, what happened when I last played?" No; Altringer had heard nothing; and Sven had to tell what it was. There had been a ball in a great room down at Naset, and Sven had been among the guests. But they had only had an old, worn-

out piano, so that there was no life nor spirit in the dancing. Then Sven took out his fiddle and it was a different matter at once. Young and old stepped out, and every time he stopped they clapped their hands and stamped as they called to him to begin again. But what a terrible ending to it all! One of the daughters of the house had danced too violently. In the very middle of the wildest dance she had clung to her partner's arm and then sunk on to the floor. And she had never risen again. She was dead.

Altringer understood, of course, what a heavy blow that was, but he did not think a young man's career ought to be ruined for such a reason. "You will get over that," he said. "It was a misfortune that might have happened to anyone, and in my opinion her partner who kept her dancing was most to blame." "No," said Sven; "it was I who made her dance. I played for no one but her all the evening. It was beautiful to see her, for she was as quick and light as the flames of a blazing fire. She danced for me and I played for her."

Altringer only shrugged his shoulders. "You know that's just nonsense," he said. "Perhaps it is no wonder you feel like that so short a time after it has happened, but next week when I send you abroad it will pass."

"No, sir, it will not pass. Wherever you may send me, I can never forget that I have played a living mortal to death."

Altringer looked at him once more. "Were

you in love with her?" "Yes," answered Sven. "That very evening I had asked her to be my wife."

Not another word did Altringer say to urge him to go abroad. "You shall be foreman in Henriksberg until you have forgotten," he said. "I do not think you know all that is needed to fill the post, but you can learn; and I know, too, that I can rely upon you." And this was how it came to pass that Sven Liliecrona had given up his violin and become a foreman of ironworks. Maia Lisa had listened in dead silence without once interrupting the speaker. How strange it was, she thought, that she was so soon to see the man who had loved so deeply and gone through such sorrow. For a long time she could not say a word, but suddenly she turned to Pastor Liliecrona and asked if his brother was dark.

Dark, yes that he was, dark as night.

The moment she had asked she thought what a very foolish question it was. But all the time that Pastor Liliecrona was speaking of his brother she had been wondering if he had looked like the tall dark smith from Henriksberg. Hadn't he just the same depths of sorrow in his eyes? Why, she could not think, but somehow in her thoughts the two had melted into one and the same.

And even now whilst the smith was standing away by the cupboard playing his gay polka tunes she found it hard not to think that he was the man who had gone through all she had just been hearing about.

He had driven up whilst Liliecrona and she were still walking outside, just when the shadows were getting so dark that they were beginning to speak of going in, and the sledge passed so quickly that they had not been able to see who was in it. Pastor Liliecrona had thought it was his brother from Henriksberg come at last, whilst Maia Lisa fancied she had seen the dark smith sitting in the sledge although she did not say so.

But she was right enough ! When they turned back to the house the innkeeper was standing on the steps and told them that a man had come from Henriksberg with a message that the foreman could not meet his brother in Svanskog that day. He had the letter with him in the stable where he was putting up his horse, if the Pastor would like to see him. Pastor Liliecrona went down to the stable and Maia Lisa joined her Aunt in the great living-room. She was already sitting there with her maids in front of the great log-fire, busy with her spinning. Maia Lisa sat down at her aunt's side and handed her the rolags. The master and men came in almost directly afterwards with their woodwork and joined the circle round the fire. Last of all, in came Pastor Liliecrona and the smith with him. They were going on to Henriksberg that evening, but not until the horse had had a rest. The Pastor chose a place as near Maia Lisa as possible, but the smith sat down where the shadows lay darkest, as far away as he could. And it was a continual buzz of gossip, joking and telling of

tales until Fru Margreta turned to the smith and asked if he would not play them a tune or two. She had been told that he had a turn for music. He had not needed much asking either. The master lent him his old squeaking fiddle, and there he stood fiddling out polkas and old dance tunes neither better nor worse than any ordinary peasant player. Maia Lisa could not help a little feeling of disappointment. The reason, no doubt, was that she was still half spellbound and could not distinguish between fact and fancy. All evening her thoughts had been busy with the man who had played the death-dance for his heart's love, and she saw only him in the shape of the smith. She had certainly expected that he, too, would have had a magic in his bow, strong and terrible enough to play mortals to their death.

In spite of all, however, she could not shake off her dream, and time after time she caught herself looking at the smith and wondering if he ever thought of anyone but the love he had lost. The smith had thrown off his stiff close-fitting peasant coat of fur that he might move his arms more freely, and now in one of those quick stolen glances that she cast at him she noticed a great, bright silver coin fastened to the watch-chain hanging from his pocket. Maia Lisa gave a little start. Was that the silver thaler she had sent him? Smiths were always so poor. How did he manage to possess a watch? Had the foreman given it to him by any chance? And even if he had, whatever had put it into his head to go about with a silver

thaler hanging to no purpose at the end of his watch-chain? Of course, he was not a——

She was amazed at herself that she kept her seat and did not jump up and cry out when, in a flash, she understood the whole matter.

Of course, it was Sven Liliecrona standing there and no other; the very man who had played his heart's love to her death. In a single moment she was so sure of this that she could have found it in her heart to go up to him and beg him to keep up the disguise no longer. She knew who he was. Why he had come to Lobyn as a simple peasant a couple of weeks ago she could not imagine. Perhaps he had put on the dress as the most convenient when he was going to peasant houses. And when no one had recognised him but taken him for a smith he had not undeceived them. Perhaps he had not liked to say who he was when he arrived in the very middle of the wedding.

She left off picking up the rolags and covered her eyes with her hands. Why had he come in disguise again to-day? She did not need to puzzle very long over this; in a moment everything was clear. This time he had a clear purpose in view, he wanted her and his brother . . .

It was strange and yet so pleasant to feel that he meant them to have a chance of seeing and talking to one another. No doubt it was after he had got the silver thaler from her yesterday evening that he had sent a speedy messenger ski-ing over the snow to entice his brother down to Svanskog. And he had let

him wait all day for him, and when he did come late in the evening he had come as a smith. He had no wish to show himself. She was not to think of anyone else but his brother. And there he stood playing peasant polkas in peasant style to amuse peasant folk! He had, indeed, once said that he would never use a bow again, but no doubt he did not look upon this as violin playing.

And it was not her brain that was telling her all this. She felt she could read his inmost thoughts and she scarcely knew whether to smile or weep at what she read. One thing was certain, that he did not dislike her since he had brought about this meeting between her and his brother. Or had he only been sorry for her because she had such a hard life at home? He had wanted to get a wise kind friend who could take her away from every hardship.

Ay, he had a great sorrow himself that he could never get away from! His love was dead and he would never forget her. Maia Lisa for him was only a poor girl whom he had found sitting crying in the chimney-corner and whom he wanted to help to honour and happiness. She was obliged to lift her head and look at the others, and it was all she could do to keep back her tears when she thought how he asked nothing of life for himself.

But just as she lifted her eyes and when lost in thoughts and dreams both of sorrow and joy she was far, far away from her everyday trials, the latch was pulled once more and someone put in her head.

She stared at the new-comer as at a stranger and went not a step to meet her. Her Aunt pushed back her spinning-wheel and got up, but Maia Lisa sat motionless, still lost in dreams. She scarcely knew who the stranger was even when she heard a hoarse voice say that she had come with Long-Bengt to fetch Maia Lisa home, nor when Fru Margreta answered that surely the Pastor's wife was not in too great a hurry to take off her coat and have a little supper before she went home again.

CHAPTER XII

ENSIGN ORNECLOU

THE new mistress of Lövdala Parsonage had a habit of sending messages and small commissions by anyone, no matter who it might be. Whether the passer-by was peasant or not, she used to stand on the kitchen steps and wave and call until he stopped. Then it fell to the lot of either Maia Lisa or Little-Maid to rush down the road and beg the travellers to be good enough to take with them a tub of butter that Fru Raklitz wanted to sell to the Captain at Berga or to return a weaving-reed that she had borrowed from old Fru Moreus. Sometimes she contrived to ask a favour which was both tiresome and difficult, so that soon people were really afraid to pass Lövdala. It wasn't pleasant to say "no" to the Pastor's wife, and yet quite impossible to slip past without being seen.

However it might be, she certainly had an unusual talent for getting folk to run her errands.

She was even able to press such a good-for-nothing dandy as Orneclou into her service. There had not seemed much prospect of any friendship between the Ensign and the Pastor's wife when he visited Lövdala in the last week of January, the time when he was in the habit

of coming for a week or a fortnight. But Fru Raklitz said as soon as he came that she would see the lazy-bones did not stay there long. She had just got the work in full swing again after all the Christmas festivities, and she wasn't going to harbour any visitor who needed waiting on.

And then, too, it was not as if he came by himself, for poor as he was, he always drove his own sledge, and the horse needed food and service no less than his master. Fru Raklitz did all she could to make him uncomfortable. To begin with, she told the housemaid to carry his heavy bag where he kept his wigs and his curling tongs up to the poorest spare room. Orneclou was accustomed to the best; where there was a fine curtained bed with a feather bolster and soft down pillows, but he had never looked so pleased with that as he did now when he was shown into the other.

"If I haven't always wanted to sleep here!" he said. This was the room they called the "night quarters," for there anyone who came asking for a night's lodging got a bed, no matter who it was. Here he could be nearly certain of having a companion every night, and he slept so badly that he really needed someone to talk to. Besides, it was rather oppressive in the great four-poster in the other room. He would much rather lie on this narrow straw mattress. And best of all there was neither fireplace nor stove, but the room was warmed from the great kitchen chimney running up the wall and half filling the room. Just think—no fumes, no

smoke, but a comfortable, even temperature day and night!

And so he went on as long as the housemaid was in the room. But no one can tell what he did when she had gone. It was a cold day and none too warm in the unheated room where he had to change his clothes and make himself smart. But his cheeks had such rosy tints and his eyebrows were so delicately pencilled when he came to midday dinner that no one would have dreamt that he had done the whole operation with fingers numb with cold. The Pastor's wife knew well enough that there never was a bigger gourmand than Orneclou, and that not only did he want good food, but he liked to eat it in a grand room served on fine damask and shining silver. She knew, too, that he had before always dined in the best room, and that they had made things as festive for him as possible; but now, when she wished to put a speedy end to his visit, she set the dinner in the kitchen parlour in very homely fashion, and offered nothing more than black puddings and cabbage soup.

Orneclou was in his most amiable mood and sat all dinner-time complimenting the Pastor on his cleverness in marrying again. Did he remember what a life the old rural dean of Sjöskoga had had when he had been left a widower for so many years? When the Ensign had last called on him the dining-room had not been scoured and they had had to dine in one of the bedrooms. There wasn't a clean tablecloth in the house, but stains on every one, and

the maids were too idle to cook anything but cabbage soup, which was made on Sunday and came back day after day—and even that they had to be thankful to get. But his dear old friend in Lövdala had contrived to get something very different. It was no easy matter to find such a good housekeeper as his wife. He had heard such accounts of her skill that he had wondered very much what delicacies he would taste on his next visit to the Parsonage. And not only that, but what an advantage for Maia Lisa to learn how a table ought to be laid and a dinner served from someone who knew exactly how these things were done in the best society.

Fine gentleman Orneclou certainly had a special gift for saying nasty things, and no doubt they did their work, but Anna Maria Raklitz was not a woman to be turned from her purpose by a couple of sharp words, so she said in her harsh voice: "If Ensign Orneclou was not comfortable in the widower's house, I suppose he could have left and gone his way."

Then Orneclou saw that there would be no dining in the best parlour nor sleeping in the proper bedroom unless he chose another plan of attack. He would, however, have submitted if there had not been one other reason as well for feeling injured. It was remarkable that a woman should want to drive him away. That had never happened to him before, and he couldn't get over it. Certainly he was a good bit on the wrong side of forty, but all the same

he was a handsome man, and no woman had ever yet been able to withstand his charms.

This gave the Ensign pause. For an hour or two he sat playing chess with the Pastor, but when the latter went out in the dusk to talk over farm matters with Long-Bengt, the Ensign went into the sitting-room with the intention of chatting to the Pastor's wife. She was sitting bolt upright by the window, making use of what little light was left to finish mending a pair of stockings. So Orneclou began somewhat cautiously to explain that he felt he was growing old and with increasing years came more wisdom than in youth. Young girls were, one and all, unstable and frivolous, but now that he had determined to give up a butterfly existence he wondered if Cousin—as an old friend of her husband's he hoped he might call her Cousin—knew any somewhat older lady—not too old, of course, but well on in the twenties—who was both domesticated and discreet and might be willing to take a poor man like himself.

The Pastor's wife never stirred. In the dim light, it was not easy to see the expression on her face, but Orneclou fancied a slight smile passed over her thin lips. Very likely she was sitting there making a fool of him. What a terrible creature Lyselius had married to be sure ! Why, as a rule, there was no surer way to an elderly lady's heart than to ask her to help in a little match-making. Orneclou had never in his life talked to a woman about anything but love or

marriage, and not a word could he say on any other subject. So he began again with the same thing, only now he directly contradicted what he had said before.

"I see plainly, Cousin," he went on, "that you have heard so much about me that you do not believe I should be content with a wife no longer beautiful nor young either. No doubt you think I should like her to be sensible and clever, and have these other qualities as well. And I think that Maia Lisa Lyselius, since Cousin has taken her training in hand——" Orneclou paused discreetly to see if he might venture farther on the same road or if he was only on a wild-goose chase. The twilight grew darker and darker, so that it was more and more difficult to see the expression on the face of his uncommunicative listener, but he almost fancied that she was slyly smiling to herself.

"Of course, the idea is for Maia Lisa to marry a pastor, and live and rule here in Lövdala," continued Orneclou; "and there is, of course, a good deal to be said for such a plan. Lyselius will manage to choose for her some fine, capable man who can do something besides stand in a pulpit, and can cultivate land as well as he can himself. Now such a husband as myself would need a helping hand at every turn from his mother-in-law, which might perhaps be very troublesome. No doubt, Cousin, you have arranged matters so that when you are left a widow—and between ourselves it is remarkable how Lyselius has failed the last year—you may be able to have a room for yourself like Fru

Beata Spaak and not have to trouble about anything."

The Pastor's wife sat bolt upright, drawing her needle in and out. But now as she turned to the window to see better, he noticed she was laughing outright.

Orneclou began to think that nothing in the world would have any effect on her, so he got up to go to his room to curl his wig or freshen up his shirt frill as was his custom when he was annoyed. But now the Pastor's wife turned and asked him: "Ensign, you have been about everywhere, do you happen to know a certain Liliecrona, pastor of Finnerud?"

The Ensign started. It seemed almost as though his words about a son-in-law had had some effect. Perhaps there had been some thought of Liliecrona, and what he said might have raised a doubt as to whether he were quite suitable.

"Olle Liliecrona," he repeated. "Why, of course I know him. I have stayed with him up in Finnerud. He is a splendid fellow, understands everything, and has taught the men and women as well all kinds of handicraft."

"I wonder if he really has an eye on Maia Lisa," continued the Pastor's wife very candidly. "We hear nothing but praise of him."

Her words betokened only motherly interest, but Orneclou fancied he heard in her tone a suggestion that she would have no objection to hearing a little scandal about this new lover.

"Of course, Cousin," replied Orneclou, "you know the world well enough to make allowance

for youth, and you must remember what a lonely life he has had up there amongst the Finns. But there is, of course, no denying that Liliecrona has had some sort of entanglement for a good many years now. Of course, it can easily be put right without Maia Lisa's hearing a word about the matter."

The darkness had at last compelled the Pastor's wife to put down her darning; she did not, however, light a candle on that account, but picked up her knitting, which she could manage without looking at it at all. Her pins worked quickly and quietly, but when Orneclou spoke of an entanglement they fairly rattled. Her voice sounded completely changed as she exclaimed: "What do you say, Ensign? Surely, it is impossible for a pastor——? How can the bishop——?"

"You do not realise, Cousin, how far it is to Finnerud. I must tell you I don't believe anyone knows a thing about it, not even his nearest relatives. It was by the merest chance I discovered it, and, of course, I have never spoken of it until now, when I see that my duty to a tender mother's anxiety compels me to disclose my doubts."

Again the pins rattled violently. "But perhaps there is no truth in it either," she returned, "everyone is slandered sometimes."

Orneclou cleared his throat. "You force me to tell more than I wanted. But, as I said, I consider it my duty to give you a clear insight into the business. I assure you, Cousin, that I had no idea how things were until my last

visit to Liliecrona shortly before Christmas. He was not at home when I came, but his housekeeper welcomed me and begged me to wait for her master. Well, it was a long time before he returned and in the meantime I began to chat with the woman. In her way she was really a superb creature, not Finnish by extraction, but from the 'Swedish Land,' as the Finns say, and wonderfully capable too. I have always admired the unwearying energy with which she made his life up there in the Finn quarters endurable for poor Liliecrona. Well, there we sat and talked. You understand, Cousin. She is not of the better class, really only a peasant girl, but very sensible in everything she says. We had, however, not exchanged many words before I noticed that there was something on her mind. I spoke kindly—you know, Cousin, that I understand women's ways—and she gained confidence in me. She asked me straight out what I thought would happen if Liliecrona got the fine living. Eight years ago, when she first came up there, he had promised to marry her as soon as he got a better post. But she was afraid now that Sjöskoga was far too large. Suppose Liliecrona should think she was not grand enough to be the wife of a rural dean!

"Now, Cousin, you can understand that she was in despair. I could do nothing but calm her, as best I might, and promise to try to influence Liliecrona in his plans. Next day I told him quite plainly that I had discovered his entanglement, and asked him why he

hadn't married at once. He answered quite frankly that he had been too poor. If he had married his maid, as he said, then she would have been Fru Liliecrona, and he would have had to keep another maid to wait on her. 'Then, my friend,' he added, 'you may be sure she would have stopped milking the cows and helping Peterkin with the field work. But marry I shall, of course, as soon as I see my way clear.' I suggested when he got to Sjöskoga. . . . 'Oh, Sjöskoga,' he replied, 'I am not going there. I mean to refuse it.'"

Orneclou stopped. He could scarcely see the Pastor's wife in the darkness, nor could he hear her pins rattling either. He felt almost terrified. Perhaps after all he had made a mistake, or, at any rate, acted very unwisely.

"Now, Cousin, I have told you all I know," he began once more, "and I must beg you not to attach too much importance to it. In any case there is not a more promising young pastor in the whole diocese than Liliecrona. Think how, with all his talents, he has sacrificed himself for those poor Finn peasants and lived in poverty these last eleven years. I must say he is a hero, every bit as much as that Corsican people are making such a fuss about just now."

But the silence continued. Orneclou grew more and more gloomy. He was beginning once more to sing Liliecrona's praises when the Pastor's wife got up and said with a very different voice: "I hear Lyselius coming in. And now, Cousin Orneclou, you must go and

have a talk with him instead of sitting here in the dark with me. He is only too glad to get such an old friend as you to himself for a little while."

And after that Fru Raklitz entirely changed towards Orneclou. He had his meals in the fine dining-room, his bed in the best spare room, and such delicacies were put before him as not even the Pastor himself had ever tasted. Nor was he much astonished. Did he not know of old that no woman could withstand him when he took so much trouble as he had done with old Raklitz? Yet it did strike him as a little strange until he had reasoned out that most certainly she had thought over his offer and intended to accept him as a son-in-law. Now Orneclou had not been much in earnest with his proposal. But, after all, why not? It wouldn't be so much amiss to get Maia Lisa Lyselius. And that he could get her was as clear as the day. The mother-in-law was so taken with him that she didn't know how to do enough for him.

But before he bound himself for good, he thought he ought to make a tour round Värmland and visit all the good old places whose hospitality he had once enjoyed. Once he was married and had a wife and house he must, of course, stay at home. He certainly could not stay at Lövdala this time so long as he generally did, but he must move on as quickly as possible, only, of course, that he might come back so much the sooner. When he explained next morning that he must go he could

see that both the Pastor's wife and daughter were sorry. Indeed, they wished to persuade him to stay, but he stood firm. He must without fail be in Karlstad before evening. He did not, of course, say in so many words that he was only going to come back again and be master of the house, but that was quite understood! The Pastor's wife, who was generally accounted a woman of more than ordinary ability, knew well enough what his plans were. He felt how he longed to be back even before he had gone. He would be comfortable here without a doubt.

Just as he was preparing to put on his furs the Pastor's wife came and asked if he could possibly do her a favour. Her ladyship in Lokene had asked her to sell her a cock and she wondered if it would trouble him too much to take it with him. If he was bound for Karlstad he would pass Lokene on his way.

The Ensign said "yes" at once, and said it gladly too, for not only was he pleased to do his future mother-in-law a favour, but he was very willing to have an excuse for looking in at Lokene and getting a meal there.

But when he said "yes" he certainly had no idea that it was a live cock he was to take with him. For he had such a terribly little sledge, there was nothing for it but to put the box with the cock in it on to the seat and take his own place on the back step. However, he put a good face on it to the end; at all costs he must show old Raklitz that she would never get a more polite and obliging son-in-law than

he was. So off he started in splendid bright January weather with the sun shining like the end of March and no cold to speak of. He felt quite a different man from when he came yesterday. Lövdala and Maia Lisa! To own and rule them both! To have a home of his own where he could receive his friend if he wished! That, indeed, was quite another matter than going from house to house all the year round and never being quite sure what sort of welcome awaited him.

It was quick travelling along the good road, and Orneclou was soon in Lobyn. Here he met an old peasant with a cartload of straw, no other than Biorn Hindriksson himself. "A rich and worthy man Biorn Hindriksson," he said to himself as he pulled the reins to stop and have a word with him. He was a near neighbour at Lövdala, and since Orneclou was soon to be master there, it would be well to make a friend of him.

But what now? Whatever was it crowing in his ear just as he stopped? He all but fell off the narrow step in his fright, for he had forgotten all about the cock. His horse Fingal did not turn a hair. He had been through so much that nothing in the world could frighten him. But Biorn Hindriksson's Brownie was not so hardened to surprises. Off he tore and tipped the whole cartload into the ditch.

This was no good beginning to friendship, and in his annoyance Orneclou cracked his whip over Fingal's back. No sooner had the sledge started than the cock held his peace.

Again he went on at a good pace, and again his thoughts turned to Maia Lisa. She was beautiful, not more than seventeen years old, and the owner of half Lövdala. A piece of good luck like that ought to fall to a man like himself who was no longer in his first youth!

Again there was someone coming along the road, this time a gentleman and lady on horseback. It could surely be no other than the Countess Dohna out for a ride in this direction. A fine woman this dowager Countess of Borg! And it was always pleasant to meet a lady who could ride so well. It was only a pity she should have with her the little black-whiskered foreigner whom she had taken under her wing.

Orneclou stopped, got down from the step and stood in a posture of admiration, hat in hand. Then the cock crew. The Countess tightened her reins and looked round in surprise. Where did the noise come from? How could a cock get on to the high-road so far from any dwelling? Perhaps she might never have found out if the creature hadn't crowed again. But then she understood, and, like the intriguing piece of goods she was, she set to work to talk to Orneclou and keep him standing still on the high-road for a full three minutes. And on the cock went, crowing between every word they said!

And dandy Orneclou had to endure this. The finest gentleman in Värmland had to submit to be made ridiculous in this way. The Countess sat there doing nothing but talk as

if she never heard the cock, and that though every other word was drowned in a shrill crow. But Orneclou was in such anguish that the cold sweat drops stood on his brow. At last he could stand it no longer but jumped on to the sledge and off he drove. In an instant the cock stopped, but Orneclou heard instead the Countess's clear rippling laugh. It followed him beyond the parish, followed him to the end of his journey, followed him all through life, for he could never forget it.

What a temptation it was to lift the lid and let the cock go, but he thought of Maia Lisa and Lövdala and made up his mind to endure. It would not do to get into his mother-in-law's black books, and once past Svartsjö Church the road went through desolate forest where he thought he would meet no one.

But as ill-luck would have it, the weather was too fine for that. Everyone seemed to be seized with a desire to choose that very day for a long drive. So it was not long before the Ensign chanced to meet the head of his regiment. It is true, Orneclou had long since left the service, but still he prided himself on such dignity and propriety of manner as beseems a man who has trodden the field of glory. But just as he drew himself up for a stiff military salute the cock must needs crow again. It really was enough to drive a man desperate! One meeting after another spoilt, nothing but misfortune upon misfortune!

Last of all far away on the Sundgard hills he met the new owner of the Biorn ironworks,

Melchior Sinclaire. That was the last straw, the worst luck of all, for people had nicknamed Sinclaire "The Cock," because he had such a loud voice, and was so perky and always ready to quarrel and fight. Sinclaire knew of his nickname, and did not particularly care for it; indeed, it was as much as anyone's life was worth to speak of hens or eggs when he was anywhere near. In his distress Orneclou decided not to stop and speak, but to drive past Sinclaire as fast as Fingal's legs could go. But whatever he did went wrong to-day. The ironmaster had been to Karlstad and bought a new set of harness bells, whose merry music so cheered up chanticleer that he began to crow just as they passed. Orneclou stood up, flourished his whip and gave Fingal a smart stroke on the loins. At all costs he must get away as quickly as possible. But he was not to get off so easily. Melchior Sinclaire was furious. He had not caught sight of the box with the cock in it, but he had recognised Orneclou and thought he had crowed as he passed just on purpose to annoy him. He whipped up his horse and tore after Orneclou to punish him.

The Ensign heard him coming and thought it would be best to stop and explain. But once more the cock awoke the echoes with his shrill note, and Sinclaire, thinking it was Orneclou, grew so furious that he roared like a great wild beast. Orneclou dared not wait for him, but beat a retreat, and for a couple of minutes there was a wild race over the Sundgard hills.

But the ironmaster had a good steed, and Fingal was old and worn out, so it was evident that the Ensign would soon be caught. And when he looked round he noticed that his enemy was brandishing his whip as high as he could to strike him over the head.

Then he said good-bye to all his hopes of Maia Lisa and Lövdala. He bent forward, lifted up the box and flung it straight in front of Melchior Sinclaire. And so he got away, or else the great fellow would certainly have killed him, for he was not the man to listen to excuses or explanations when he was angered.

When the Ensign reached the Ilberg inn he was utterly worn out; in fact, he thought he would never get over this drive of his.

He never showed his face again at Lövdala, for this was the most sickening adventure he had ever experienced in all his life. To own and rule indeed! He couldn't bear even to think of it.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DAILY ROUND

YES, the daily work was now in full swing at Lövdala, and every morning and evening the nine spinning-wheels in the kitchen whirred and hummed as loud as any windmill. And in full daylight there was no dawdling either, for the time had to be used for sewing and weaving. For a while it almost seemed as though the Pastor's wife had forgotten that Little-Maid was in the house. She had not set her to work nor given her any duties except to sweep the kitchen-parlour and to keep the fire mended. But on the very day that the Ensign went, Fru Raklitz came to the kitchen door and beckoned to her to come into the best room. Little-Maid got up at once, but she was terrified, almost beyond words, of sitting alone with her mistress. Her feeling towards her was no ordinary dislike, but something that sent cold shudders down her back every time she set eyes on her.

Little-Maid had never before been so terrified of any human being, and she had her own ideas as to the reason of it all. For she could never forget that there was something peculiar about the Pastor's wife. No one else had snow-

white hair with such a young face, and it was not natural either for any female creature to speak with a voice as loud as a roaring torrent, nor would any ordinary mortal be capable of causing so much annoyance and unhappiness. She thought pretty often, too, of what her mother had told her of the Black Lake and the three things that stayed behind when the water dried up. Mamsell Maia Lisa wouldn't hear a word of it, but Little-Maid knew well enough what the third thing was, and that they had had to do with it in Lövdala more than once already.

If the Pastor's daughter would not talk of it, there were others in the house who could and would. Little-Maid only had to creep away of an evening to the servants' room where Long-Bengt and Old Bengta, his mother, and Merry Maia, his wife, sat gossiping round the fire. Then Old Bengta used to tell how the "water-spirit" of Black Lake felt homeless when everything had dried up, for it was not to be expected that such a fine lady would be content with the poor little Black Lake stream that trickled away from the old bed of the waters, and that she tried at once to sneak into one or other of the houses round. And she had managed to creep in once or twice, but in other places they had guessed who she was and made a clean sweep of her before she succeeded in doing any mischief.

Merry Maia told a tale of a son of Herr Olavius the first Svartsjö pastor, who one spring night had gone down to the Black Lake

brook and been drowned. It was as plain as daylight that the "water-spirit" had bewitched him, or else he could not possibly have come to grief in a drop of water like that.

Long-Bengt used to talk of the morning when he and the Vetter-lads had been mowing hay on the South field. The two boys and he had seen in a second who it was coming out of the grass. And all her clothes dripping wet! Why, that surely was sign enough of what sort of creature she might be! And her eyes, too, as wild as any troll's! None of the three had the slightest doubt as to who the present wife of the Svartsjö Pastor really was, and all three were equally sure that they would never see the last of her until she had ruined the Parsonage and all in it.

Little-Maid shared their belief, at any rate, in the evenings or when it was dark. In daylight it was harder to think that the homeless "water-spirit" of Svartsjö was really living at Lövdala, and busying herself with spinning and weaving. But even then her doubts were strong enough to make Little-Maid shudder every time she saw her.

However, there was no help for it; when the Pastor's wife came to the kitchen door she had to follow her through the next room, where Mamsell Maia Lisa sat embroidering a sheet, into the best parlour, a beautiful, large room, furnished in birchwood with gilt inlays and blue striped carpets on the floor. There were two windows in the room; in one stood a tall green lily, in the other a little work-table.

The lid was open, and she could see the many little compartments where lay reels of thread, balls of silk, wax and needle-book, sampler and rolls of ribbon, finger-shields, crochet-hooks, and many another handy little thing. The Pastor's wife showed her everything there was and made her guess what they were used for. Indeed, she was so pleasant with her that she even tried to laugh when the child guessed wrong, although the corners of her mouth looked as if they rebelled against such unusual exercise. The more friendly she became, the more firmly Little-Maid set her mouth, and the more watchful grew her bright eyes. Suppose the Pastor's wife was thinking of coaxing her into saying something that might be dangerous for Mamsell Maia Lisa?

But there did not seem to be any evil design this time. The Pastor's wife sat down at the work-table and gave Little-Maid a seat at her side. She was to learn to sew now, for the Pastor's wife had promised her mother to give her a good training. To begin with, she showed her how to set about threading a needle. Of course, that is generally a difficult task for small fingers, but Little-Maid passed the thread through the eye at her very first attempt. The Pastor's wife was really amazed at such quick work. If she could manage everything else as easily, they might make a grand sewer of her! Then the Pastor's wife gave her a little bit of material to practise on, and showed her how to make a knot and push her needle in and out of the cloth. Little-Maid heard her

instructions in silence, took the piece of stuff, held it over her first finger and made stitch after stitch as though there was nothing difficult in it at all. Well, to be sure! How astonished Fru Raklitz was! She had never seen such a thing before. But Little-Maid's gravity could hold out no longer and she shook with laughter. At last the Pastor's wife began to understand. Had Little-Maid learnt to sew before she came to Lövdala?

"No," she answered, "not a stitch before I came here."

"Well, then, someone here must have taught you—Mamsell Maia Lisa perhaps?"

Little-Maid was terrified at the mere mention of Mamsell Maia Lisa, and hastened to say that Fru Beata in the brewhouse-room had shown her how. "How glad I am to hear that," said the Pastor's wife. "Who would have thought she could sew with such hands as hers?"

"Sew indeed," exclaimed Little-Maid; "why, no one in the house can sew like Fru Beata."

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do," answered Fru Raklitz. "We'll go down now to Fru Beata and thank her for teaching you so well."

And off she started with Little-Maid, but she did not take the direct road to the brewhouse wing, but went roundabout, away past the stable and dairy. Fru Beata used to sit all day long at a window from which she could see everything coming from the main building, but she had no view on the dairy side. When

the Pastor's wife and Little-Maid had reached the steep stairway that zigzagged up the outside wall, Fru Raklitz asked her to run on in front. It was so easy for young legs, and she herself would manage nicely after her. So on ran Little-Maid and clattered up the steps so that no one could hear that anyone else was creeping up as well.

Fru Beata always sat with her hands folded when the Pastor's wife came to see her, and always used to say how hard it was no longer to be fit for any work, for in her time she too had been a fine worker, although of course not so capable as Anna Maria Raklitz. No doubt the Pastor's wife had been sorry for her. How long the day must be for anyone compelled to sit and not able to do a hand's turn in all the world's work!

But now, as the Pastor's wife came in, Fru Beata was sitting embroidering a sheet so diligently that her arm rose and fell as quickly as the wings of a bird in full flight. When Fru Beata caught sight of the Pastor's wife she made a movement as if to put away her sewing. But when she noticed that her visitor had already seen it she went on with the work. The Pastor's wife came up to her and was overjoyed beyond words to find her at her work-table. What a good thing her gout was so much better that she could work again, and might she see what she was doing, for she had heard that Fru Beata was such a beautiful sewer that her stitches were as regular as a row of pearls.

"But how strange," continued the Pastor's wife, as she bent lower and lower over the piece of work. "I seem to know this sheet. Surely, it is one of the pair that I gave Maia Lisa to-day to finish before to-morrow. Perhaps her Grandmother is kind enough to help her with one of them. Well, I have no objection to that; oh, dear, no, not the least, but I think you ought to let me know, so that I may give Maia Lisa enough to do. For if she only has to embroider one sheet instead of two she will indeed lead a life of idleness."

Fru Beata sat with the work in her hand, quite unable to answer, for her lower jaw, and indeed her whole head, was trembling as though someone were standing behind her chair shaking her. The Pastor's wife turned to go. She could see Grandmother was busy, so she would not hinder her any longer; no doubt she did not need company so much now when she was well enough to work. Fru Beata stammered out something about excessive work for young folk spoiling both life and health.

"You know perfectly well yourself that Maia Lisa has not too much to do to find strength to sit up reading half the night. I do not think young people take any harm from having to work, but what does harm them is to creep behind backs, shuffle out of duties, and learn to deceive."

With this, off Raklitz went, and Fru Beata could not say a word of defence before the door shut behind her. But the stairway she had to go down was steep and slippery, so that

there was no making haste. And meantime Fru Beata had managed to regain her self-control, and just as Fru Anna Maria reached the lowest step, the old lady opened the door and "Stepmother!" she cried after her, in a voice loud enough to be heard all over the house and garden. Nor did she wait for any answer, but went straight back into her room and shot the bolts so that she should not be taken by surprise again.

The Pastor's wife did not seem in the least concerned as to what Fru Beata had called out. Indeed, she was in excellent spirits, and as she went up the slope to the main building she told Little-Maid very calmly to go into the best parlour and set to her sewing. She herself would come directly she had said a few words to Mamsell Maia Lisa. Little-Maid pressed her lips firmly together and, though she answered never a word, she had much the same look about her as that Christmas Day when she had a tussle with the storm-wind. When they reached the porch she did not go into the best parlour, as she had been told, but turned off towards the kitchen door. The Pastor's wife asked where she was off to. Had she not heard that she was to go on with her sewing? Little-Maid answered in a low voice that it was no longer necessary.

"Why not necessary? Do you think you are so clever already that you have nothing more to learn?"

No, Little-Maid had not thought that. But she did not need to learn any more than she

knew already, because she was going back home to Koltorp. And she stepped up to the Pastor's wife with outstretched hand. She would be glad to thank her and say good-bye at the same time.

"But, my dear child," said Fru Raklitz, "I really don't understand. Why have you got to leave?"

Little-Maid stepped back as if to be out of reach whilst she was giving her explanation. "Mother was nursemaid at Lövdala and loves the Pastor's daughter. And when mother was here last Christmas she told me that if Mamsell Maia Lisa had anything more to put up with on my account, I was not to stop, but go straight home."

When Little-Maid had said this she drew back along the wall until she reached the corner by the kitchen door, and there she stood and waited for whatever might come. The red spots flared out on Raklitz's cheeks and she stepped up to Little-Maid with uplifted hand. Little-Maid crouched down with a cold glitter in her bright eyes. She knew she was going to be beaten, but she was so filled with hatred that she did not feel afraid, but was, instead, almost pleased that they had come to open strife. But something happened now that she would never have dreamt of. The Pastor's wife did not even box her ears, but restrained herself at the last moment and said, with a forced smile:

"My dear child, you look like a cat getting ready to fly at a dog. But you needn't worry.

I am not going to beat you for being faithful to those you serve. That is just what I like, and I promise you Maia Lisa shall not hear a word of what I have found out to-day. And now we will both go into the best parlour and never give it another thought."

Little-Maid felt quite dizzy. There was something under all this that she did not understand. But she was so glad to be able to stay at the Parsonage that she did not set her wits to work to guess the riddle. When they were at the work-table, however, there was no sewing done, for the Pastor's wife opened a drawer that was hidden under all the others and took out first an A B C book and then paper, a quill pen and a bottle of ink. Little-Maid thought she was going to examine her in reading and writing. That was not her object, however, but she began to tell how when she was young she was so busy helping her mother with the smaller children that she had never been able to learn to read and write. But since she had married the Pastor she had found it very troublesome not to know how; so now would Little-Maid be her schoolmistress? That had been in her mind when she had got her to come to Lövdala at Christmas, but they had not had any spare time till now. Little-Maid was delighted, and at once said she would help her as much as she could. So the matter was settled, and the Pastor's wife begged Little-Maid not to tell anyone that she was teaching her to read. She was afraid folk would laugh at her, so they must pretend that she was

teaching Little-Maid how to sew, and that was the reason why she was to come into the best parlour for an hour every morning.

Well, surely there could not be any harm in that.

And Fru Raklitz said that she was very pleased about it, for Little-Maid must see how unpleasant it was for the wife of a Pastor not to be able to write. She had a letter she wanted to send off that very day if only she could manage it. Perhaps Little-Maid was clever enough to write down on paper the words she dictated. Little-Maid agreed in a moment. She put up the leaf of a table, spread out her paper, drew the cork out of the ink bottle, and sat down to write at her mistress's dictation.

CHAPTER XIV

A SPRING EVENING

THE Pastor's daughter was out one spring evening taking a walk with Little-Maid. It was an old habit of hers to go out for a little every evening and her stepmother had not forbidden it, only insisted that Little-Maid should go too, for it was not fitting for a young girl of her age to stroll about the country roads alone. She was going southwards as usual, for the road was best in that direction, and so slowly was she walking that Little-Maid found it hard work to put up with such dragging footsteps. One moment she would hurry on in front, and the next lag behind as far as she could, just to have the chance of running herself out of breath to catch up Mamsell Maia Lisa. The road wound up to the wooded heights that bounded the Lövdala lands. As the Pastor's daughter walked on she could not help thinking how strange it was that Little-Maid could find so much to amuse her in the short stretch of road that they tramped over every evening. First there was the echo. Little-Maid ran up the avenue before her to get a little talk with it. She knew it lived a little

way up the road, exactly in front of the Lövdala rye-barn, so there she stopped, turned to the barn wall, and began to cry:

"Echo, echo, tell my fortune?" "Tell my fortune," answered echo.

"Is my lover a very fine man?" "A very fine man," answered echo.

"And has he very much money?" "Very much money," answered echo.

"Is it all or nothing true?" "Nothing true," answered echo.

The Pastor's daughter herself had taught Little-Maid this a few months ago, but all was so different then from now, when she had no strength left to stand joking with echo.

Little-Maid kept by her side until they reached the small gravel-pit lying to the left of the road, close under the mountain-side. There she left the Pastor's daughter, to jump down the pit and dig amongst the fallen stones in search of mica. It was only when she had quite lost sight of Mamsell Maia Lisa round the bend of the road that she came racing after her. Then they went on again to the brook. Little-Maid could never understand how the Pastor's daughter could pass on without even stopping to look at its waters rushing in a dark torrent from the forest heights and making fall after fall, each finer than the last, before it reached the level of the road. When it had foamed and roared under the narrow bridge, it wanted to break its bounds again and spread far and wide. But Little-Maid could not put up with that. Down she hurried from the road to dig

a dam and force the brook back into its old bed again.

She would have been grateful if Mamsell Maia Lisa would have stopped and helped her. But it was as much as the Pastor's daughter could do to get over even level ground, dragging herself along rather than really walking. Other years she too had been quite ready to dam up the brook, but then, indeed, she had been but a child. Suddenly she stopped, for all at once she realised what had happened to her. She had grown old, she had been robbed of youth and youth's pleasures. The Pastor's daughter went on and on, and Little-Maid was forced to give up the brook and run after her. It was not for long, however, that she kept on the high-road.

They came to a gate leading into a spinney, where Little-Maid had heard white wood anemones were to be found. They were not ready yet, but spring was so far advanced that there was hope of them any day now. Little-Maid opened the gate just to peep in, for she had the idea firmly fixed in her mind that this year she was to be the first to bring white anemones home. As for the Pastor's daughter, she was walking along like an old, old body, not the least anxious to look for spring flowers.

A few steps farther on Little-Maid had another good friend whom she never failed to call upon. That was the owl that lived in the big hollow birch, the largest tree in all Lövdala. When Little-Maid used to poke a dry twig into his nest, out came his claw to push away

the bit of wood, so that she never saw any more of the owl than his great claws. The Pastor's daughter knew all about this, for she too in her time had stopped to tease the owl. Now she could not understand how there had ever been any fun in it at all.

As soon as they had passed the hollow birch, Little-Maid came running up, and the Pastor's daughter knew she would stick close enough to her for a time. For now they had to go by the mossy old garden wall where there was no lack of ghostly beings. Ah, how lovingly the Pastor's daughter looked back to the time when she too had been afraid of the uncanny headless Pastor who might perchance be seen just here by the stone wall!

It was uphill now, and Maia Lisa noticed that she was only going at a snail's pace, and felt as though she would never get to the top. Farther than that she never went; for there, close to the edge of the road, lay a great granite block called the Rest Stone, and she used to sit down on it for a while. On the front of the stone a little seat had been hollowed out, just big enough for her and Little-Maid to squeeze in together. She closed her eyes and felt too utterly weary to say a word, and Little-Maid kept silence too. Once the Pastor's daughter looked up, for she thought the child had run off again on some new expedition. But no, there she sat, gently stroking a fold of Maia Lisa's dress as it lay across her knee.

Everything was so hard for the Pastor's daughter, for her who ought to inherit Lövdala

and all the parish. She thought this poor child was the only one who had not forsaken her. She felt so old and tired just because everyone had left her, and as lonely as one whom death has robbed of all her friends.

Since she had come back from Svanskog she had not met a single person who wished her well or held out a helping hand. When she first came from there every day she had expected someone to come and set her free from all her troubles. She did not know who it would be or how they would help her, but she felt so many wonders had happened during those two days, that when they had once begun they could not fail to continue.

But, since then, day after day had passed and nothing had happened. Weeks had followed weeks, all so much alike, that as she looked back she could not distinguish one from another.

There was something peculiar and incomprehensible in the silence around her. At times she fancied that events which concerned her were happening far away in the world. She was surrounded by an echo of voices; sometimes even she felt very worried because someone was longing for her and wanting to reach her. But the whole of February, March, and April had gone now and not a message or letter had she had from those who were free to move about as they pleased and were not shut up as she was in an iron cage. Now she began to realise that no one was coming, and that she must fight her battle alone without any

helping hand. But how hard it was to give up all hope! She thought she had won such strong kind friends, she still could not believe that they did not trouble about her.

The old stone she was sitting on was said to have lain on the wayside ever since the time when Lövdala had been nothing but a cow-house in the midst of wild forest where the dairy-maids came every summer with their cows and goats. Then some young cattle-man had hollowed out a seat in the stone block to give a resting-place to his sweetheart. From the hill-top, where it lay, Loven and the church could be seen in the far distance, and those who tended the cattle had no doubt sat there many an evening looking for someone to come and fetch them from the solitary pastures down to the homes of men again. When she sat here she could always feel that many a longing soul had been there before her. The Pastor's daughter buried her head in her hands and sighed. If anyone wanted to help her, they must come soon. She could not hold out much longer; not that any disease had attacked her, but she was near to death's door from very sorrow and desolate loneliness. She would certainly not be able to crawl up here many more times.

Besides, it was not only for herself that help and rescue were needed, but for Lövdala too. The home whose every stone was dear to her heart was on the high-road to ruin. They had only reached the last days of April, and it was cold for sitting still, so she began to go slowly

homewards, no longer thinking of herself, but only of Lövdala.

One Sunday towards the end of March her father had come home from church with the news that Pastor Liliecrona had petitioned the King to release him from his nomination to the living of Sjöskoga. When he spoke of this at the dinner-table her cheeks had flamed in her eagerness to hear more, and she had at once asked if dear father had heard why he would not accept the high position. But her father could not answer. He only knew that Pastor Liliecrona was doing much good amongst his people, and he added that he must be a man of singular merit to be able to refuse a competence, and a high social position as well, to stay with those who needed him.

Her stepmother, too, had shown special interest in the news. She had asked if it was really a fact that Liliecrona had now quite given up Sjöskoga, and when she was assured that that was so, she had said straight out in her abrupt fashion that in her opinion dear father ought to try for it.

The Pastor had certainly not been very often at a loss in his life, but now he sat speechless, staring at his wife. Indeed, he had almost a frightened look, as if he felt it a misfortune that such an idea had occurred to her. He was evidently no longer very sure that he had the strength to say Fru Raklitz nay.

Maia Lisa was quite upset as well. She would have liked to think that her stepmother was joking, if such a thing had been possible.

And in one way, of course, her idea was not so foolish. Maia Lisa herself had often thought her father ought to be bishop at least, but since he had had that stroke it would indeed be doing him the greatest wrong to urge him to try for a large and burdensome living. Dear father had certainly been much stronger lately, and now seemed almost his old self again, but her stepmother could not fail to know that his strength was no longer what it was before.

But Maia Lisa forced herself to keep silence. If she had ventured to bring forward her objections, she would only have raised her stepmother's zeal to fever heat.

When Fru Raklitz got no reply from either one or the other she went on talking about the matter. "If you sit rooted to one spot too long, you grow old before your time. There is nothing so good for anyone as to be shaken out of an old rut and go to fresh work."

Maia Lisa thought that it had gone too far with dear father for him to be refreshed with increased work, but she still contrived to hold her peace. Then her stepmother began to talk as if it were already decided that the Pastor would fall in with her suggestion. No doubt the whole election would have to take place again, but in any case he must go to Karlstad the next day and inquire, and then it would be best for him to go straight on to Stockholm and make his application to His Majesty in person. She knew he had special qualifications as far as learning went and could get many

strong supporters, as he had been tutor many years ago to several influential men who were now in high places.

Until then Maia Lisa's anxiety had been entirely on her father's account, but now another thought flashed across her mind so that she lost her self-control and interrupted her stepmother saying, "If dear father goes to Sjöskoga he cannot keep Lövdala."

Her stepmother turned towards her and crooked her fingers till her hand looked like claws, whilst all the detestation and hatred she had ever felt for Maia Lisa shook her voice to such a degree that it was barely possible to understand her words as she answered:

"Is your father compelled to sit here and keep Lövdala warm for you? It is just as well that he can get clear of it, and be a free man again and get into a position suited to him."

The Pastor had finished his dinner and made haste to get up from the table. He was glad to be able to put an end to the conversation. But now Maia Lisa knew what her stepmother meant when she had said that one day she would teach her how to cry. Dear father was to go and try for Sjöskoga simply because her stepmother knew that she loved Lövdala above all else, and that nothing in the world would give her such sorrow as to lose her childhood's home.

For a good week Fru Raklitz had to stick to her work before she could stir the Pastor. Every day she begged and prayed and used all her influence to induce him, at any rate, to go

to Karlstad and see how the matter stood. But up to the very last it seemed as if she would never succeed, and certainly she would have had to give up the attempt if something else had not come to her aid. Her husband had been the Pastor of Svartsjö for twenty years, and all the time he had had to bear much annoyance and many a sore trouble too. First and foremost his heavy task when the old church was burnt down by lightning and he had to get a new one built. Not only was he obliged to beg money from the King, but he had asked for help from several wealthy land-owners, and had travelled from parish to parish to collect funds. When the church was finished it was recognised that the building was mainly due to his efforts, and he had on that account enjoyed the deep gratitude and respect of his people. But lately he had certainly noticed that his parishioners had begun to fall away from him. They did not come as of old to ask his advice on this or that question. The reason, of course, was that they thought his advice now was dictated by his wife's opinions. But the Pastor did not understand that, and felt aggrieved.

And much the same had happened with his immediate dependents. The dwelling-house, no less than the church, had been burnt down in the Pastor's time, and he had been put to much expense and inconvenience to build it again. All the people on the estate who had, for the most part, worked there long before his time had been glad of his success both in

building and in the cultivation of his land, so that he never met with any but friendly looks. But lately there had been a change. He saw sullen faces both in the servants' room and in the kitchen, and, as he would not for a moment give the blame where it rightfully belonged, he went in a constant state of wonder why his good old servants now proved themselved ungrateful and surly.

All this was an immense help to the Pastor's wife when she wanted to persuade him to try for Sjöskoga. But she would certainly not have succeeded, even with this to help her, if there had not been the trouble with Vetter as well.

The Pastor's daughter was so tired and depressed that she paid little heed to time, but she thought it must have been about the middle of March that her stepmother had been so frightened because Vetter had come home from prison again.

Vetter lived in a tiny cottage, a little to the north of Lövdala, and they ought really all of them to have been frightened that he was home again, for he was a professional thief. But Vetter had been a neighbour of Lövdala's for many years, and they did not trouble much whether he was at home or away, especially as they knew he was too clever to steal from his next-door neighbours. Every time Vetter came from prison he vowed he would stay at home, but he was never able to keep his vow. He liked his profession, and he was as proud of his clever thefts as the Pastor's wife was of her fine cooking. But the consequence of this was

that he spent the greater part of his life in prison. When the Pastor had married a second time, Vetter had been under lock and key, so that the Pastor's wife had not the slightest inkling that she had a professional burglar as her neighbour.

So now she was nearly terrified out of her senses. It was Fru Raklitz's firm conviction that everyone stole, dear father scarcely excepted, and she lived in perpetual fear of losing all her belongings. In the course of the many years that she had been housekeeper in grand families she had got a fair amount of silver as presents, and this she kept in a box which she put every night under her bed. This silver was her dearest possession, and now when a burglar lived quite close, she was certain it would be lost. She already had her cupboards and doors so securely fastened that they could not be made any safer. But after Vetter came home she had time for scarcely anything but trying the locks and counting the keys on her ring. In the evening she used to fetch a great axe from the woodshed to put beside the bed, and she never rested until the Pastor hung a loaded gun over the head of the bed. He tried to convince her that Vetter never stole from his neighbours, but it was impossible to calm her fears.

When Vetter had been at home a couple of days he came to pay a visit to Lövdala, as he always did. The Pastor's wife was standing in the kitchen, and as she saw him pass the window she asked at once who it was.

"Why, that's Vetter," answered the housekeeper with a little astonishment. "Of course he is coming up to let the Pastor know he is at home again." Fru Raklitz had certainly not expected this answer, for the man who had gone into the Pastor's room looked a nice respectable old peasant. It was too much for her, and she nearly fainted from fright. As soon as she had recovered a little she hastened into the other rooms, took the silver chest and sat on the drawing-room sofa, clasping it in her arm as long as Vetter stayed in the house. And a good time she had to sit, for the Pastor had always had a certain liking for Vetter, and did not let him go until he had heard all his latest experiences. And when he had finished the Pastor had to give him a few words of warning and admonition, so that it might not look as though he had let him tell his tale just for the pleasure of hearing him.

After this the Pastor's wife grew a little less frightened for the valuables in the dwelling-house, but so much the more uneasy for the barns and out-buildings, and above all, for the larder and storeroom. This had such a wretched old lock that anyone who liked could open it. If the key wasn't handy it was quite easy to turn it with a bit of stick.

In the very same week when there was so much talk about Sjöskoga, Fru Raklitz had sent to Smedsby to fetch Olaus, a master locksmith, and set him to make a new lock which was to be strong enough to resist the cleverest burglar that ever was. For four days Olaus

stood working in the smithy, but at the end of that time he had made a great lock so heavy and stiff that even the Pastor's wife herself could scarcely turn the key.

When it had been fixed on the larder door Fru Raklitz was quite happy. She locked the door herself in the evening and took the key to bed with her. She said she should sleep more easily that night than she had done for many a long day. Next morning when she awoke the great key lay untouched under her pillow, but that had not prevented something very remarkable from happening in the larder under cover of the darkness.

There stood the door, just as securely fastened as the evening before, but none the less everything movable that had been inside—tubs of meat, poles[1] of bread, hams, and sausages, weights and measures, buckets and sacks—had all been carried out and arranged on the larder steps. Everything was moved out, as we have said, but nothing destroyed, nothing taken away, and when they saw it all standing outside the door it was impossible not to wonder how it could possibly have got there. The Pastor's wife, like everyone else, at once guessed that Vetter had been there. But when she had poked and pried and found that not a crumb was missing, she really could not understand a thief like that.

[1] Swedish bread is baked in the form of thin biscuits, about nine inches in diameter with a hole in the centre, through which a long pole is run. These poles are kept in the storeroom for three months at a time.

When the Pastor went for his morning walk, however, he met Vetter and got an explanation.

"Vetter, Vetter!" he said, "what are you up to now? Was it you that visited my larder last night?" Vetter looked quite insulted as he replied:

"Pastor can give my respects to his wife and tell her that I have never stolen from my neighbours. But she needn't think that any of her locks are good enough to keep me from anything I want to get."

Oh dear, dear! If only the Pastor had been as of old he would have enjoyed the joke for many a long day, but now it only annoyed him. He knew the tale would go all over the parish, and everyone would laugh at his wife and at him too perhaps. Not a single word did he answer. No doubt in his heart he felt disappointed in everyone, and that as he had no friends left amongst his people it might be just as well to get away from Svartsjö. When he came back to the house he told his wife he would drive to Karlstad next day and see how matters stood about Sjöskoga.

Dear Father had gone and come back again, and it really seemed as if his wife had been right, for he had looked much brighter on his return. He had been to Karlstad, and to Stockholm as well, and got many fair promises. There was no doubt about his getting away from Svartsjö. The Pastor had heard a strange piece of news too on his journey, and that was that Pastor Liliecrona of Finnerud had been married in the spring. Folks said it was not a

good match, for his wife was of quite lowly birth. And this was really the reason, so the Pastor had been told, why he had chosen to remain up there amongst the Finns.

Maia Lisa had not dared to ask her father for any more particulars, for her stepmother had fixed some very inquiring looks upon her. But at least she now understood why she had heard no word of her kind helper. And it was especially after that that she had lost all courage and hope. Pastor Liliecrona had seemed a brave and resolute champion, and she had trusted him as she would a kind brother. Until now she had expected him to come riding up in the triumphant strength of his youth and put everything right for her.

CHAPTER XV

THE ACCUSATION

EVERYONE in Lövdala was so consumed with curiosity that they could scarcely contain themselves. For just think, the foreman of Henriksberg had come driving up with a woman no one knew, and instead of going into the drawing-room as other visitors used to do, they had gone to the Pastor's study and stayed there talking alone with him for several hours. Neither the Pastor's wife nor his daughter nor any of the maids could solve the riddle of why they had come. The housemaid who helped them out of the sledge had noticed that they both looked serious and troubled, but that was all the information she could give.

The Pastor's wife had tried to sit in the parlour with her work, for this room adjoined the Pastor's, and if she could have stayed there she would soon have found out the visitors' errand. But she had not been seated two minutes before the Pastor peeped out of his door and begged her to go somewhere else. What they were talking about in his study she should hear at the proper time from his own lips.

The strangers had come so early in the

afternoon that the Pastor's wife was uneasy lest they had not dined. So she sent in the housemaid to ask if she should get some dinner ready, but the maid brought back word that they wanted nothing. Whilst she had been in the room no one had spoken, so all she could report was that the woman had sat there drying her eyes as though she had been crying.

The man who had driven them over was invited into the kitchen to have a meal. He was very glad to tell all he knew, which however was not much. He had never set eyes on the woman until the evening before, when she had walked down to Henriksberg and asked to see the foreman. Early this morning the foreman had come down himself to the stable and ordered a sledge for Lövdala, but he was a man who would be silent for weeks together and not one word had he uttered all the time they were driving over. The Pastor's wife had not been able to sit quietly at her work, but had done nothing but walk from one room to another ever since the strangers had entered the house. Once she took Little-Maid into the drawing-room to ask her if she had told anyone she was teaching her to read and write.

Not that it mattered so much if she had. But Fru Raklitz was so looking forward to telling the Pastor that she could read his books, if only Little-Maid could keep the secret a little longer. Little-Maid assured her that she had said nothing. She thought to herself that she had never had the least desire to tell either the

Pastor or anyone else about the piece of writing. There was something else far harder not to speak about, for she could not understand why Mamsell Maia Lisa had so strictly forbidden her to tell the Pastor how her stepmother treated her. What would it matter if he should find out what sort of evil spirit he had for a wife?

Maia Lisa was the least curious of all. Lately her soul had seemed almost paralysed. She could be neither glad nor sorry, and cared nothing what happened to her. She fancied her stepmother would never cease tormenting her until she lay on a bed of sickness. Not that that mattered much. And least of all did she dread the thought of death. It would be but a beautiful, quiet rest. She was sitting at her loom when Little-Maid came in to tell her that the Henriksberg foreman had come to Lövdala, and she only stopped her work for a moment. "The Henriksberg foreman"—how unfamiliar the name sounded. Why should his coming matter to her? If it had been in the winter she would have expected everything from it, but now . . .

At five o'clock the Pastor rang his bell and asked for a tray of bread and butter and three glasses of milk to be taken into the parlour. As he had particularly said three glasses his wife understood that he did not wish for her company, so she sat sewing in the drawing-room until she heard her husband and his visitors go into the parlour. Then she put down her work and went into the kitchen.

"Come with me," she said to Little-Maid. "I must have the Pastor's best clothes to get them brushed, for it is Sunday to-morrow, but I have not been able to go into his room. We must try, if we can manage it, now whilst they are eating their supper." They crossed the hall on tiptoe, and Fru Raklitz opened the door of the Pastor's room so softly that it could not possibly disturb those others who were sitting in the parlour. Then she opened the wardrobe door just as cautiously.

"Now get in there," she whispered to Little-Maid; "but do be quiet."

Little-Maid got into the cupboard and in a second the Pastor's wife had shut the door. "Now they are coming. You must just stay where you are for a little," she whispered through the crack of the door. And Little-Maid heard how she crept away. But if the Pastor's wife had contrived to shut Little-Maid in the cupboard to find out what the strangers had come for, she had her trouble for nothing. For now the Pastor sent both for her and his daughter, and even for old Fru Beata from the brewhouse room.

When they came in, the Henriksberg foreman was standing with his arms crossed, leaning against the Pastor's great bookcase, and the woman he had brought with him was sitting on the little corner sofa. She was young, and would have been good-looking if her face had not been so flushed and tear-stained. As each one entered the Pastor got up and introduced the strangers. This, he said, was the

wife of Pastor Liliecrona of Finnerud, and that was her brother-in-law, Foreman Liliecrona of the Henriksberg ironworks. Nothing more was said until the Pastor's wife and Fru Beata had seated themselves in the Pastor's two great high-backed chairs, and Maia Lisa had taken her place on a stool close to the writing-table, where she had sat in bygone days whenever she came to her father's room.

They all felt a storm was brewing, but no one knew on whom it was to burst until the Pastor directly addressed his daughter. "No doubt you already know all about Fru Pastor Liliecrona who is sitting here now?" he said.

Maia Lisa kept her eyes cast down, for she did not dare to look at her father. No sooner had she entered the room than she noticed that something terrible had happened to him. "Now," thought she, "dear father's death-blow has come." His face was grey and he panted heavily between every word he uttered. Her anxiety was so intense that paralysis and indifference had taken flight at once. Her hands began to tremble and she clenched her teeth to keep them from chattering. She expected nothing less than that he would have a stroke and fall down dead before her eyes. But the Pastor sat there waiting for her answer, and at last she so far mastered her fright as to be able to say in a fairly calm voice: "Dear Father, I have never seen Fru Pastor before to-day. I do not understand what dear father means."

Her father shrugged his shoulders. Perhaps

she would understand better if he informed her that Fru Pastor was the lady who had for several years been Pastor Liliecrona's housekeeper? There was something strange in the Pastor's voice, a note of anger and contempt. There was, too, a threatening frown on his brow, and one flush after another flamed across his face. Maia Lisa saw that something had happened which made her father not only very unhappy, but very angry as well. And although she could in no wise imagine how such a thing was possible, yet she had to confess to herself that his anger was directed against herself. Almost unconsciously she got up from her little stool and stood straight and slim in front of her father to defend herself more ably. "Dear Father, no doubt, can see that I am no wiser than before."

The Pastor looked as though he had not expected such obstinacy. He had, of course, no doubt that she knew the whole story, but since she wished to hear it again he had no objection to telling it from his point of view. Possibly her aunt in Svanskog had not given her an accurate account. Maia Lisa ventured to interrupt her father. Her aunt in Svanskog had talked a good deal of Pastor Liliecrona, but had not mentioned one single word about his housekeeper. The Pastor waved the interruption impatiently aside. It was all one whether she had heard the gossip from her aunt or from someone else. No doubt from some woman or other, for he knew perfectly well that they were always the most spiteful to one

another. If a man had chanced to speak of the matter he would at the same time have reminded her that before she judged her neighbour she must put herself in his place. How many of those who rejoiced that Pastor Liliecrona had stayed long amongst the Finns, spending his strength for their salvation, had pictured to themselves what sort of a life he had up there! The Pastor himself had never known until to-day that he had been living in a native hut with one room only, and that his stipend was barely one hundred thalers. What a labour for whoever managed his house to keep the wolf from the door even! She who was sitting on the sofa there had not only woven his clothes, but made them as well. She had taken his cows and sheep to their forest pastures, and all the years she had served him she had done far more for him than any spoilt fine young lady could ever dream of. She, indeed, could write to her credit, and hers alone, that Pastor Liliecrona had been able to carry on his good work there.

The Pastor's daughter felt that she too was beginning to feel a little annoyed as well as the Pastor. Why, indeed, was dear father angry? Did he think she had tried to beguile Pastor Liliecrona when they chanced to meet in Svanskog? Surely there was no sin in speaking to him! But she kept her words in check, and only begged her father to believe that she had never heard a word of all this. The Pastor impatiently fingered a little crushed note lying on the writing-table in front of him.

It was certainly remarkable, he said, that she had got to know of the relationship between Pastor Liliecrona and his housekeeper, when it had been kept such a secret that even his brother was entirely ignorant of it until after their marriage. But when she had managed to find it out, how could she have been so hasty in passing judgment on it? Could she not see that the other had the most sacred rights? Even if she were not yet his lawful wife, even if she were of lower rank, ought her long devotion, her great self-sacrifice, to have been misunderstood even by the most hard-hearted?

The Pastor's daughter once more begged him to excuse her, but she really did not understand what her fault had been. It was evident how terribly vexed the Pastor was at being forced to give so many explanations, and great drops of sweat stood out upon his brow.

If it were really any news to her, he went on, he would inform her that many years ago Pastor Liliecrona had promised marriage to the woman who was now his wife. It had been arranged that the marriage should take place as soon as he was in a position to keep a wife in comfort and not be obliged to let her lead a servant's life. Nor had there ever been the least doubt that he would keep his promise until just after this Christmas. Pastor Liliecrona had then gone a little journey, to meet his brother, it was said. He had gone no farther than Svanskog inn, but on his return he had been utterly changed. He was restless and gloomy, and no longer talked of their marriage. So

they made inquiries as to whom he had met in Svanskog. (And with that he turned and faced Maia Lisa.) "But perhaps you have no idea either whom he met?"

"Dear Father, I know he met me. Pastor Liliecrona talked to me all day, very simply and naturally, just like a kind brother."

The Pastor made a gesture of annoyance again as if in despair at her stubbornness.

"It may be true enough that Pastor Liliecrona did not make love to you that day, but you cannot have been in any doubt as to his feelings. Otherwise you would certainly not have been bold enough to send this note."

Maia Lisa broke in without the least ceremony. "Dear Father, I have never written to Pastor Liliecrona. If Fru Pastor . . ."

"There is no question of writing to Pastor Liliecrona, but of a note to his housekeeper."

"Oh, indeed, to his housekeeper!" And Maia Lisa's voice was now every whit as angry and contemptuous as her father's. "Oh, indeed, dear Father has heard that I have written to her, written, I suppose, to ask her to give up Pastor Liliecrona for my sake?"

The Pastor looked at her coldly. "No doubt you know what you wrote," he said. But the Pastor's daughter was angry now in good earnest. She was no longer intent on sparing her father, but only on clearing herself, and she wanted to get to the bottom of the matter. "Dear Father," she asked, "is my name written at the foot of this letter?"

"No, there is no name at all, but it was sent to

Finnerud with a message from your aunt in Svanskog that it had come from Lövdala for Pastor Liliecrona's housekeeper." The Pastor was certainly amazed that Maia Lisa was not overwhelmed by such proof as this, but she simply asked again :

"Dear Father, tell me what else I have done. It is very amusing to hear this, and I really cannot guess everything."

"What else you have done!" And down crashed the Pastor's fist on the table. "Is it not enough to have written a letter, to have tried to entrap a man who belonged to another, to have insulted a woman whose only fault was her love? What you have done? You have driven this woman to despair, so that in desperation she committed the most fatal error. For she went to Karlstad, told the Bishop the whole tale, and begged for help. Whereupon the Bishop takes her part, and writes to Liliecrona that now, when he intends to enter on a more important charge, he must be less easily satisfied with his own conduct. And he gives him to understand that he cannot be appointed until he has settled his private affairs in a satisfactory manner. It is true the Bishop has written as kindly and tactfully as possible, but Pastor Liliecrona is a proud and hasty man and he has felt shamed and insulted to the last degree. If nothing had been done in the matter, there was reason to hope that his natural kindness of heart would have won the day, that he would have conquered the fleeting passion which had overcome him, and

that of his own free will he would have followed the call of duty. But now, when he feels himself forced, he grows desperate, and is seized with bitter hatred for the woman who has such claims upon his affection. At first he says not a word either of his hatred or of the Bishop's warning ; but one day, about a month after he had received it, he goes to the stable, harnesses his horse, drives up to the door, and asks if she will take a little drive. Up she jumps, snatches up a handkerchief for her head, and sits down in the sledge just as she is, in her short everyday fur jacket and her stout shoes. Off goes the sledge, rushing past one or two big houses, only Finns' it is true, but she feels ashamed and proposes getting out and going home. But no, the driver will not stop. So she submits and they drive into a desolate forest, ever faster and faster, until she begins to be frightened and once more begs to get out. Then with an angry look he tells her harshly that she is driving to her wedding. They are on the way to the Västmarken Parsonage to be married. She thinks he is joking and sits quiet for a little while, and then once more begs him to let her get out and go home. With a jerk the horse is pulled up, and she is told she is at liberty to leave the sledge if she pleases, but if she does, she may give up all hope of ever being married. He intends now to go to Västmarken and marry her, but if she does not seize this opportunity he will never give her another. When she replies that they cannot possibly be married until the banns are called,

he tells her that has already been done, without her knowledge, in her native parish, and tells her, too, with such a terrible face and manner, that in her fright she nearly gets out. But she bethinks herself that this would be to lose all the joy of life, and keeps her place. She is full of doubt all the way, knowing how great the hatred must be that forces her to be married without a proper wedding-dress. Even in the church before the altar she almost says "No," but she will not give up the man she loves to the writer of that letter, of those abominable lines that have been the cause of all the misery. No doubt, too, she hopes that his hatred will lessen in time, and that she will be able to reconcile him and win back his affection. But she is wrong in this, for she is really hated with a terrible hatred. Soon she learns that her husband has made up his mind and declined the valuable living, and she understands that he has done so to compel her to drag on a life of poverty, for he grudges her any happiness that might come from a position of comfort and respect. Nor is this all. She soon notices something far worse, and that is that he is going to ruin himself in every way. She notices that he is beginning to drink without any moderation, and, beg and pray as she may, it is all of no avail. She cannot disguise from herself that life no longer holds a single joy for him. He pays no heed even to his poor parishioners; his one idea is to fail utterly, to go to ruin. Think now how a very fine work is stopped and a very good man turned into a

wild beast! And all this the result of a foolish girl's thoughtlessness! Perhaps now she can understand what she has done. Above all, perhaps she can now understand that she would do well to own that she wrote the note in the delirium of her foolish love. For if not, then her father will be forced to believe that she wrote it in a devilish intrigue to ruin Liliecrona, so that his place in Sjöskoga might be gained by one to whom she was more nearly related. And then she would never be forgiven nor be called his daughter any more."

All the time she stood listening to her father's words Maia Lisa was thinking how she could possibly convince him that she had not written the note. Alas, if on any other occasion she had heard this tale told with such eloquence, how it would have moved her! But now she could only think of the injustice done her, and that not by her father alone. She did not heed the poor wife, but she did think of the man who had come with her to make the accusation. He, too, believed in her guilt, believed that she had written to beg for a man who belonged to another.

She turned suddenly from her father and looked at Liliecrona.

His eyes had not been fixed on her, but he started as if he felt her glance. He had been looking very sad indeed, but now the kindly smile suddenly passed over his face and he looked at her reassuringly, as at a child who has played a foolish trick and as though he wanted to ask her to be comforted, for no great

harm was done. But in a second he looked away again.

She turned impatiently from him, and whilst her father went on speaking, her eyes sought her grandmother. And Fru Beata's eyes met hers very seriously, and with almost the same expression as Liliecrona's, an expression plainly saying, "Be sensible now and don't be afraid," and she too looked away again in a second in the same direction as Lliecrona had done.

Then Maia Lisa looked there too and saw they were both intently watching her stepmother. Fru Raklitz seemed strangely altered. She was deathly pale, and her eyes had much the same wild look as on the morning when Maia Lisa first met her. It was evident that she was overcome by a terrible fear. For a moment the Pastor's daughter wondered if her stepmother had written the note herself, but only for a moment, for she remembered that Fru Raklitz could not write. Neither was her fright to be wondered at, for the Pastor's wrath was quite unnatural and she had every reason to fear how it might end. It was really a good thing that Maia Lisa had looked at her stepmother, for the sight reminded her that she must be careful not to irritate her father. In perfect silence she listened to the very end, and when he cried that he would disown her as his daughter, she answered quite humbly: "Dear father, do as you wish with me. If I may no longer live under my father's roof then I must . . ."

She was interrupted by Fru Pastor Liliecrona, who stepped up to her quickly, and, as she seized her hand, cried in a tone of misery that this must be the end of the matter. Neither she nor her brother-in-law had ever meant any mention to be made of that letter. They had only shown it to the Pastor to prove that his daughter really loved Liliecrona. She had come on quite a different errand. She had gone to Henriksberg yesterday because she was in such despair. She could not bear Liliecrona to go to ruin on her account, so she had wished to ask his brother if there were no possibility of his being freed from her. She wanted to offer him his liberty; she would never come into his sight again if only she were certain that he could have the wife he loved. And it was to talk of this that she had come here with his brother. They did not mean any ill to Mamsell Maia Lisa. All they wanted was to get her to help them to save the man who was on the road to ruin.

The Pastor's daughter turned to her, and in a moment she realised what a splendid young man Pastor Liliecrona had been and how terribly unhappy his wife must feel. Her heart once more beat with her usual gentle kindness, and with a trembling voice she answered: "But alas, that I could not do. Help him, indeed, if I had the power—but I could never marry him. He is not the man I love."

She felt how the hot blood rushed over her face and neck. She had spoken as if there were someone she did love.

With an impatient gesture her father waved her words aside. "You have surely not . . ."

But here he was interrupted by grandmother, who, from her far-away arm-chair, said: "Dear son, how inconsiderately you treat Maia Lisa this evening. You know very well that no maid of seventeen years will ever confess her love, least of all before so many hearers. You ought to have spoken privately to Maia Lisa, and then she would not have refused to explain everything."

The Pastor's daughter could not help turning and looking at her grandmother. There was such a meaning tone in her voice and she almost thought she was trying to give her some private hint. "You treat this matter so violently, dear son," continued grandmother, "because you think it implicates you as well. But you must not imagine that anyone will ever dream that you had a finger in it. Everyone knows you would not do a thing to harm Pastor Liliecrona so that you might get the important living yourself." A deep silence filled the room, no one knew what to answer.

"I think Maia Lisa may very well own to having written the letter, and that you, dear son, may forgive her. Everyone understands that she did it from youth and inexperience, never guessing that it could have such terrible consequences."

Maia Lisa saw that her grandmother was urging her to take the guilt on her own shoulders, but she did not understand why she wished her to do so. At last the old lady made a slight

movement with one hand to call her attention to her stepmother. Fru Raklitz still sat crouching in the same mortal fear and now Maia Lisa understood. Her grandmother believed her stepmother had sent the note herself, and saw that it was better for her father to think Maia Lisa had sinned from love and inexperience than that his wife had done so from the basest of motives. Ah me! such a demand seemed too terribly hard for Maia Lisa. And in her uncertainty she looked round and cast a stolen glance at the man still standing quietly by the bookcase. She thought he met her glance with tender sympathy, but that must have been a mistake, for he could not fail to hate her.

"Dear Father," said Maia Lisa, "forgive me for denying it. But you terrified me . . ."

But as she spoke she was overcome by a sense of the wrong she was doing herself in owning to such a base and horrible deed. She burst into tears and threw herself into her grandmother's arms with the cry, "It is too hard, I really cannot."

"Yes, of course," said the old lady. "It was hard, I know, but it is said now. Come down to my room and have your cry out." She put her arm round her waist and led her to the door, still sobbing and repeating that she could not do it. "You need not say any more," said Fru Beata; "your father understands it all; after all, you are but a child."

When they reached the threshold Liliecrona came back to life again. He hurried forward

and opened the door for Fru Beata, and when he saw the hall door was shut he went with them and opened it as well. That done, he noticed the front steps were steep and difficult for an old lady and so was the slope down to the brewhouse. So he came too, and gave a helping hand to grandmother. Then there was the horrid stair to her room, and again he must go all the way. When they got inside her room, he said not a word, but threw his arms round Fru Beata and kissed her cheek, then turned to Maia Lisa, took her in his arms, and kissed her also.

Not a word did he say, and was gone in a moment. But everything this man did, always came so suddenly, just when it was least expected, that there was never any chance of being prepared to prevent it.

After all, it was Little-Maid and no one else who settled the matter at last. The strangers took leave and went their way the moment Mamsell Maia Lisa had gone with her grandmother to her room in the brewhouse. The Pastor could not have felt very well, for he did not leave his chair to take them to the front steps and say farewell. As soon as they had gone his wife came and told him she had put some supper in the best parlour, for she thought he must need a little refreshment after all he had gone through. But he only asked to be left in peace and quiet. It was Saturday evening, and he had to finish writing his sermon.

So he took his papers out of his desk and scribbled a couple of lines, but no more, before

he threw down his pen, pushed back his chair, and walked up and down the room. Then he lay down on the corner sofa, and the room grew so silent that Little-Maid began to wonder if he had fallen asleep. The cupboard door was cracked and she could see he was lying on the sofa, but not if his eyes were closed or not. If only she could have been certain he was asleep she would have tried to creep away, for she was desperately tired of being shut up in the narrow cupboard. Besides, how essential it was she should be free to talk with the Pastor's daughter and Fru Beata. She could give them some information that they would be glad to hear.

The Pastor had lain quiet so long that he could not possibly be awake, so she thought she might at least venture to open just a chink to see how things were. The door moved without a sound, but the Pastor was not sleeping, only lying with his eyes fixed on the opposite wall. Just as Little-Maid was going to close the door again he turned his eyes in that direction and caught sight of her.

He got up and came to the cupboard. There was nothing for Little-Maid to do but to open the door and step out. "What is the meaning of this?" asked the Pastor. "What business have you in my cupboard?"

His face was so stern that Little-Maid grew frightened. The Pastor and she had always been good friends indeed; she liked him better than anyone in the house, except, of course, Mamsell Maia Lisa. She did not want him

to think any ill of her, so she hastened to tell him that the Pastor's wife had shut her up in the cupboard when he and the strangers had been in the parlour. They had only come in to fetch his Sunday clothes.

The Pastor stood thinking and then said, "You may just as well tell the truth; the matter cannot be worse than it is; it was, of course, Maia Lisa and not my wife who shut you in."

Little-Maid was so offended that she could scarcely get out her words. "Mamsell Maia Lisa!" she said. "The Pastor's daughter shut me up in a cupboard to stand there and listen? She wouldn't stoop to such a thing."

The Pastor sighed. "There isn't much she wouldn't stoop to now," he said. "You needn't think I shall be any more vexed with you if you own that it was Maia Lisa who shut you in. I shall not be angry with you for that or anything else if only you will tell the truth."

Little-Maid knew very well that no untrue word had passed her lips since she had been at Lövdala, and said so too. But the Pastor did not seem to hear. "Of course, I see that Maia Lisa had good reason to be afraid," he said. "I can understand how she asked you to get in and listen to what we were saying. But the matter in no way concerned my wife."

Little-Maid stood in utter silence. She did not know what to say, for she had been strictly forbidden by Mamsell Maia Lisa ever to tell the Pastor any tales about his wife. And her

mother had told her not to as well. It was not the same here as in Svanskog, where she was free to say anything she pleased. When she did not answer, the Pastor took it for granted that he was right in what he thought, and ordered her to go away. She was on her way towards the door when he called her back. Something else had struck him that he wanted to ask her about.

"Listen now," he said. "Since you are in the habit of doing such errands for Maia Lisa, perhaps it was you too who helped her to write that letter. It is in a child's hand, and you can both read and write, can't you?"

"I have never written any letter for Mamsell Maia Lisa," answered Little-Maid, "but I wrote one for the Pastor's wife."

"Oh, indeed; you wrote one for my wife," said the Pastor; "but never for Maia Lisa." And it was evident from his tone that he did not believe her, any more than before. Perhaps you remember what was in the letter that my wife got you to write?"

Little-Maid answered that she could say it word for word if the Pastor wished, and he bade her try.

"I have really no business to write," she began to repeat, "but I venture to beg you, dear madam, to consider what you are doing. Pastor Liliecrona has now found someone who will make him happy. If you will go away of your own free will they will always be grateful and their future happiness will be secured. You must remember, madam, that the new

parish has a right to demand a Pastor's wife of unblemished name."

The Pastor threw up his hands. "That's enough," he said, fixing a long and piercing glance upon her. "And that is what you wrote for my wife?"

"Yes," answered Little-Maid without a moment's hesitation. The Pastor's wife had forbidden her to tell that she was teaching her to read and write, but she had not said a word about this letter.

The Pastor only shrugged his shoulders. "Now you can see you are telling a lie," he said in a weary tone. "You were standing in the cupboard all the time, and, of course, you heard that Maia Lisa owned to writing it herself."

Little-Maid felt how red she grew. She thought she really couldn't endure this; it vexed her so that the Pastor should think she was telling a lie. "You can go," he went on. "I could not understand at first how it was the letter was not in Maia Lisa's handwriting, but now this too is explained. You can go and tell her that."

But Little-Maid did not go. "It *was* the Pastor's wife who made me write the letter," she said. "And it *was* the Pastor's wife who shut me in the cupboard."

"Have you and Maia Lisa agreed to say that?" The Pastor began to look angry, and she saw she would be driven out if she could not think of some way of convincing him. As she looked round helplessly in every direction, she caught

sight of the old crofter-woman just passing the window. "See, there goes the messenger who was sent to Svanskog with the letter," she said. "You could ask her whether it was the Pastor's wife or the Pastor's daughter who asked her to take it."

The Pastor thought of answering that he would hear no more about it, but he felt the compelling force of Little-Maid's obstinacy. He got up and went to the door. As he hastily opened it he stumbled against someone who was standing very close to it, and that someone was his wife. He glanced at her, stopped and looked again as though to be quite sure that it really was her, then went out to the steps and asked the old peasant woman one or two questions. When he came back, Fru Raklitz had gone. He sat down by the writing-table and called up Little-Maid. "Now you shall tell me how everything happened when you wrote the letter," he said. And Little-Maid told her tale so clearly that he could not have a shadow of doubt any longer.

"I see I have done you injustice, Nora Stormwind," said the Pastor, "and now as a reward you may go down and tell Maia Lisa all about it."

Little-Maid needed no second bidding. A moment after she was down in the brewhouse room where there was nothing but sorrow and weeping, telling all her tale. At first the Pastor's daughter scarcely listened, but at last she understood that her father knew the truth now, and then she sprang to her feet.

"Grandmother, grandmother!" she cried, "I must go and see how he is." But at that moment the door opened and her father stood on the threshold. And no longer the same father as to-day and yesterday, but the father of bygone years, a dear loving father who stood waiting for her there with outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XVI

THE REST STONE

A FEW days after the great upstir, Maia Lisa was out at the usual time walking with Little-Maid along the road. This evening she was not walking along with dragging footsteps, depressed in mind and weak in body, for instead of only one there were two to call out to echo, two to dig for mica in the sand-pit, two to dam up the brook, and two to gather anemones in the copse. She had not quite heart enough yet to tease the owl though, so she left Little-Maid at the big birch tree and went on alone up the Rest Stone hill. The bird must have been more sociable than usual that day, for Little Maid did not join her again at the haunted wall, nor afterwards either.

When Maia Lisa had come far enough to see the Rest Stone she suddenly stopped, for there sat a man, not in the narrow hollowed-out seat, but right on the top of the stone itself. His back was bent and his chin propped in his hands; his eyes, however, were not fixed on the ground, but were looking away up into the tree-tops. He was busy whistling to a thrush perched on a tall pine across the road, and he answered it and gave it back note for note until it sang as

though its throat would burst. So intent were they on their game, both man and bird, that they never heard her coming. She stood still for a moment listening and looking at him with amazement. When she had met him before, he must most certainly have been weighed down with sorrow. Never until that evening had she thought that he could not be more than twenty-five years old. Now he looked like a very boy. She was so astonished at this that she could not refrain from a merry laugh.

He turned his head to one side to listen, and looked at the same time towards another tree-top, as if he thought the sound was coming from there. Then Maia Lisa laughed again and now he heard what it was. Down he jumped from the stone, and with eager steps came to meet her. He had just been waiting for her, he said. He had been to her friend Britta in Lobyn to ask her how he could manage to see Mamsell Maia Lisa by herself, and Britta had told him that she was in the habit of coming here to the Rest Stone every evening.

Her heart began to beat very fast as if it expected some great happiness. Dear, dear! how could it be so foolish? It might have known by now that he had come on no pleasant business. No doubt he was going to speak about his brother; probably repeat his sister-in-law's proposal under more favourable circumstances. And it was as she thought. He led her with some ceremony to the Rest Stone and helped her up where he had been sitting,

whilst he himself remained standing on the path. Then he began to ask her very seriously if it was really a fact that she did not care for his brother.

And here again, as in Svanskog, she did not know why she felt at once both touched and angry, nor why her anger won the day so that she answered very sharply that she did not understand why he troubled to ask. Surely he did not imagine that she could not be in his brother's company a couple of hours without falling in love with him! He did not seem in the least put out by her annoyance. It was incredible that just before he had been sitting there whistling to a thrush, for now he seemed as serious as if he had some important business on hand and had thought beforehand of every word he meant to say. No doubt he looked like that when he was selling iron or striking a bargain with the coal-drivers.

He begged her not to think him impertinent, but he had asked because he must know if her heart was free before he went any further. She was seized with an irresistible desire to tease him and break down his air of certainty. "It isn't a foregone conclusion," she interrupted, "that my heart is free because I do not care for Pastor Liliecrona. There may be others. . . ."

He bowed a little scornfully. "That is all right," he said; "and if there is the least prospect that the one whom Mamsell Maia Lisa is thinking of is likely to come and claim her hand, I will not go on."

The hot blood rushed to her cheeks, but she looked straight into his sorrowful eyes as she answered: "No, there is not the least prospect."

"In that case I would like to ask Mamsell Maia Lisa for advice," he said as he took from his note-book a sealed and folded letter which he held so that she could not see the address. "Would Mamsell Maia Lisa advise me to post this or to tear it up?"

Maia Lisa made no answer. She could not help thinking of the morning when he jumped down into the fox-pit. Then it was a blow here, a blow there, and all done in the twinkling of an eye. "Why can't he jump quickly and strike his blow so that I may know what he means? What is the reason of all this ceremony?"

"This letter, Mamsell Maia Lisa," he continued, and his voice grew, if possible, still colder and more business-like than before, "is written by a young man who a few years back stood at the grave of his heart's love and vowed to go through life alone for her dear sake. Since then the young man has never thought for a moment of breaking his vow, indeed he has never even felt the slightest temptation to do so. He has left his heart in the loved one's grave and it cannot live again. But, Mamsell Maia Lisa, a few months ago, this young man found a poor child sitting lonely and desolate. In her eyes he read the mingled gentleness and humility of her heart, and was even more astounded by her strange likeness

to his lost love. He felt at once the greatest sympathy and seemed to hear the voice of her whom he had lost whispering that he must help in her loneliness the young girl who was her very image. The young man tried to bring her into union with the noblest man he knew—his own brother. He saw them meet, saw them sit together on the same hearth, saw visions of the greatest happiness for them both, when these visions were destroyed by the most unhappy circumstances. His brother was first thrown into the most terrible misery, and, in the attempt that was made to save him, the young girl was brought without any fault of hers into a position of the greatest difficulty. Every day now the young man seemed to hear the voice of his lost love calling to him from the grave at least to offer the maid a share in his home, where he would try with the tenderest care to secure her happiness, and where she would be safely guarded from the cruel hand that now oppressed her. Under these circumstances, dearest Mamsell Maia Lisa, the young man wrote this letter. He meant to send it off this morning, but then he hesitated. He felt, Mamsell Maia Lisa, he must first hear your opinion." He stopped and with his last word laid the letter down upon her lap, so that she could read the address: "To the Learned and Reverend Assistant Pastor, Herr Erik Lyselius."

Never, no never in all her life had Maia Lisa felt so humiliated. When he had done what she never expected, when he had asked for her

hand, to think he had done it in this fashion! Simply because he was sorry for her!

Her first impulse was to jump up, tear the letter into fragments and throw them in his face. She was more angry with him than she had been with her father when he married Raklitz. And the thought flashed through her mind: "I am evidently made so that I cannot be really angry except with those I love." But Maia Lisa had gone through much since the day when she had flared up at her father and his wife and could now restrain herself in quite another way. She only slipped down from the stone, let the letter fall to the ground, and began to go down the hill without a word.

And she walked on a good way, right up to the stone wall, without anyone following her. And as she walked she noticed what a beautiful evening it was. The birds were singing in the trees, the midges dancing in the breeze, the sunbeams playing on the fresh young leaves, the streams rippling and murmuring beside the path, whilst plants and grass were sprouting on every hand, so gay and green that she almost thought she could hear them growing. But all this only seemed to increase her wrath. Surely he might have understood that on such an evening he ought to come in the right way if he was coming at all. If only he had had the sense to let it alone. She would have been less unhappy just walking and thinking of him.

He might have had the sense, too, to find out how things were with her before he put this shame upon her. If he had known that she

was reconciled with her father and that her stepmother had run away the very day that he and Fru Beata Liliecrona had come to Lövdala, run away without a word and never come back again, perhaps he might have spared his pity. But in any case it would have made no difference. If she had been in the greatest distress she would have been just as angry with him for asking her to marry out of pity only. She would not have been so angry with anyone else, not even with his brother, if he had done the same.

Suddenly she stopped. Why was she so angry with him? The answer came like a revelation. Surely because she loved him!

Yes, oh yes! This then was love. She had read of it in her books, sung of it in her songs, but never before had she felt it in her own heart. No doubt it had lain smouldering, a tiny spark within her soul, all the spring, but she had not recognised it. Now love shot through her like a consuming fire until she almost wondered that its brightness did not shine through and around her. She turned round. Everything was so changed in a moment. Love burnt in her heart and since that miracle had happened she was no longer the same. She could not keep her anger against the man who had taught her what love was.

He had followed her and was close behind, so that as she turned quickly she found herself face to face with him.

Surely such a fire as that within her must be infectious. Its reflection flamed in his

eyes, or was that perhaps not reflection only? It almost seemed too bright. She was still so inexperienced, but the vehemence with which he pressed her to his bosom seemed to her of the same nature as the longing that drove her there.

Her astonishment was so great that she scarcely knew if she dared to trust her senses. But the words that he uttered in broken sentences, these eager questions if she loved him, this breathless confession that he had loved her from the very first but had been ashamed of his weakness, this angry remorse that he had tried to deceive himself and run away from his love, this defiant speech that he troubled neither about the living nor the dead if only she loved him—could these come from a heart not burning for her with the same fire that for his sake was consuming her own?

CHAPTER XVII

THE WATER SPIRITS IN LÖVDALA

FELAX stood in the porch, barking and howling all night long. Little-Maid had never heard him do the like before, and not a wink could she sleep. No doubt Mamsell Maia Lisa was lying awake too, much as she needed a good night's rest whilst she was so delicate. Little-Maid felt she must try to quiet the dog. So she threw on her skirt and jacket and slipped through the kitchen into the hall. Before she had managed to turn all the locks and pull back the bolts on the front door the dog had stopped, but she went out all the same to coax him in. It was strange she could not see him. She was certain he had been in the porch all night, but now, when she had had the trouble of getting up, of course he was gone. She went right out to the steps and called and called, but there was not a sign of him anywhere.

It was a beautiful night. The sky was covered with tiny white clouds lying in wreaths and circles as though they were playing some graceful games when nobody was looking. The sun had not yet managed to climb up above the mountain, but for all that it was broad daylight.

It was not the least chilly, but so soft and mild that she did not feel cold although she had come out with bare feet. The row of six great rowans standing before the dairy, with their intermingling branches looking like a green wall, were in full bloom. The great clusters of white blossom brightened up the green background like stars shining in their beauty on the darkness of a wintry sky.

Perhaps it was only in contrast to the fresh green of the early spring, but Little-Maid thought the houses round about looked one and all so old and dilapidated.

She looked at the loft over the stable, at the semicircular windows of the dairy peeping out from under the blackened thatch, and at the crooked brewhouse door. It all looked so sad in the beautiful spring night as though it were sighing over its age. She looked at the men's house with its stone foundations, and at the barn standing on its wooden posts, at the many gates now all closed and fastened, and at the long rows of fences.

They were so old that they all hung awry, and leant this way and that. The roof beams were bent, the walls grey with green moss growing in their crannies. It was the first time that Little-Maid had thought that the house with all belonging to it was old and needed repair or even building afresh. But such thoughts only come in the spring when trees, bushes, and fields are all decked out in their fresh green garments. Perhaps for houses too there is something corresponding to winter

and spring, although they may not follow in such quick succession as for trees and bushes. It would be spring for a house, when young people came to it, pulled down all that was old and built it up anew. And winter, when the young folk grew old and what they had built was worn out and longing for fresh young strength to pull down once more and put up afresh. It was strange, thought Little-Maid, that such ideas should come into her mind. But then the night was strange too, so warm and close and full of mystery. She almost felt afraid and was going to hurry in, when she remembered the dog again.

As she looked round on all sides to find out where he had got to, she thought she saw something moving on the grass plot under the rowan trees. Now Little-Maid had lived in the depths of the dark forest and gone errands for her mother both early and late, but she had never either seen, or expected to see, anything out of the ordinary. Mother had always said she need not be afraid, she was not the kind to meet either ghost or troll. All the same she saw something remarkable now, without a shadow of doubt. She was a little taken aback, but not so easily frightened as that. Besides, there was nothing to be afraid of, only some little people dancing.

There were just two, a gentleman and lady, both about as tall as a six-year-old child, but very slim and delicately made. They were both dressed as nobles of the highest rank, in black velvet with lace and gold braid. The

gentleman had a three-cornered hat, a sword at his side, a silk-embroidered coat, and buckles on his shoes. The lady wore very full, short skirts, red stockings, a large hat with feathers, and carried a fan in her hand. They did nothing but dance. He took her hand and with uplifted arms they tripped forward a little way, then turned and tripped back again. They parted, then met again, bowed, and last of all threw their arms round each other and waltzed in a circle.

Little-Maid was absolutely certain that it was the most beautiful sight she had ever seen. How pleasant it was to watch them as they simply flew over the grass. No human beings could dance like that, but these dancers seemed light as air itself. Their faces looked like the finest china, and they had tiny hands and feet. How sweet and delicate they were to be sure!

She really could not tear herself away as long as they kept on dancing, so there she stood, wondering why they were so gay and dancing so merrily just on that night. Well, perhaps it was not so much to be wondered at. No doubt they were the good tomtes of Lövdala, and were delighted that things had gone back to the good old ways since Raklitz had run away. When Little-Maid saw the dance she was more than ever inclined to believe the truth of what Long-Bengt had said. He was the last to see Raklitz. He had met her late on Saturday evening down in the Black Lake meadows. She was looking very wild, just as she had done when he had first seen her, and he insisted—indeed said he

would swear in any court of law—that he had seen her go down into the waters of the Black Lake brook. Perhaps then the good little people were glad that the cruel, deceitful "water spirit" had lost her power over Lövdala.

What masters of dancing they were to be sure! Why did other people lie sleeping in the light nights instead of dancing on the green grass? Why were other folk not so gay and happy? Why oppressed with so many cares that they could not forget?

Little-Maid heard a dull thud in the house as of something heavy falling, and ran back into the hall. There she stood listening, but could hear nothing more. Still she was certain the noise had come from the west room where the Pastor used to sit. She hurried with all the speed she could to the Pastor's daughter and begged her to get up, for the Pastor was certainly not well.

Mamsell Maia Lisa hastily threw on some clothes as she asked Little-Maid what had happened. Little-Maid hurriedly told her how she had been standing watching the two dancers when she had heard a heavy fall.

The Pastor's daughter turned deathly pale. "Those two never come except when Lövdala is to have a new master," she said; "but I do not think anyone has ever seen them dancing before."

She had only managed to get on one shoe, but she left off dressing and hurried to the west room.

There lay the Pastor motionless, full length

upon the floor. "What is it, dear Father, what is it?" said the Pastor's daughter as she bent down over him.

In a second she looked up to Little-Maid who had come with her. "Dear Father is dead," she said. "We must say our thanks to him now, it may be he is not too far away to hear us."

She kissed his hand very tenderly and whispered a few words into his ear. Then Little-Maid had to kiss his hand too. Then the Pastor's daughter got up and looked round as if to see what had happened at the last. He had been sitting at his writing, for his pen was still wet. No doubt he had felt ill whilst he was working, and when he had risen to go to the bell and call for help he had fallen to the ground. His sermon lay on the table half written, and the last lines of trembling, broken characters straggled across the page. The Pastor's daughter read them in a low voice: "When the labourer's task is ended he longs for rest, and rejoices that a better man is to take his place."

And the tears came pouring from her eyes as she said: "I know now why they were dancing for dear Father. They knew he longed to go. They knew he wanted to be free."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOME

THE Pastor's daughter was sitting in the kitchen parlour with her Bible and Psalm-book before her, searching God's Word for comfort in her heavy trouble. It was early morning, and scarcely twenty-four hours had passed since she had found her father lying dead upon the floor. All through the day there had been so much to see to, that she had had no time to think of her loss. But with the night grief had come in all its bitterness and driven sleep from her eyes, so she had risen before anyone else and begun to read.

But very soon she closed her books and with folded hands thanked God that she was no longer lonely and forsaken, but had a true friend who could help and protect her. Her step-mother would be sure to come back now and take possession of the property, and if she had not had him she would be completely in her power—and then she would have needed her tears indeed, not only for her father, but for herself as well. Scarcely had the thought passed through her mind than she heard a soft and beautiful music outside the window that overlooked the garden.

She knew who the player was, for had she not sent a message to him yesterday? She wondered for a moment if it were quite fitting for him to play outside a house of mourning, but in a second she brushed the doubt aside. He did not find it easy to express himself in words, so he had come with his violin. It was no more unfitting for him to tell her of his sympathy in that way than in any other.

She was sitting with her back to the window, so she could not see him, nor did she dare to move. This was the first time she had heard him play, for she could not count the tunes he had fiddled in Svanskog. And even in the midst of her sorrow she could not help a little feeling of joy that he had taken to his bow again. She knew it was his deep love for her that had given him the power to do it.

To think that mortal man could play like that, could conjure forth such sounds of beauty from a bow and strings!

He played so sadly, so very sadly, that great tears began to flow down her cheeks. But just as they did so, the music entirely changed. It was no longer gentle and consoling, but now she felt, although she could not quite understand it, that it had grown wild and full of terrible despair.

She grew more and more astonished. That was no fitting dirge for her father, the father who had always been happy himself and tried to bring happiness to others. He would never dwell on sadness or torment. As soon as he found that life was black and complicated he

had left it and gone away. Of course, their own hearts could not but be filled with longing, and a sense of loss, but there must always, too, be brightness in their remembrance of him.

No: she could no longer believe that he was playing to comfort her. He was using his bow now for someone else, to tell of another's sorrow, another's despair. How rightly was he called a master! Little as she knew of music, she could understand him as though he were speaking in the plainest words. And what a bitter plaint it was, the plaint of one covered with the blackest night, of one passing through deep waters, and tormented by the consuming fires of affliction. And there was no strong arm to lift him to the light, no redeemer to set him free, no saviour to quench the fires of torture. What sorrow oppressed her heart! In her anguish it seemed as though it must burst. If some great sinner in the nethermost depths of hell had taken the violin in his hands, surely he would have uttered his woe in such tones as these. But this man standing out there! Of whose sorrow was he telling—of his own or another's?

She waited for a change, for the player to strike a new note, but her hope was vain. He played nothing but an ever-growing misery, no longer in notes of beauty, but in screams of discord. She could not sit and listen any longer; surely he must have met with the most terrible misfortune, so she opened the window to question him. No sooner did he see her

than he stopped with a wilder note than any before. His hat had fallen off during his wild music, and his hair lay low across his brow. His face was as pale as a sick man's, and every feature was drawn with pain.

"You said you wanted to hear me play," he said. "Now you have had your wish, and know what it sounds like." His tone was so sharp, alas! and his speech so violent, that she was forced to believe he was angry with her. The very thought was such a shock to her, that she dared not open her lips to ask what had happened.

He went on with the same violence: "You have never heard me before—perhaps you did not even know who it was playing?"

Something prompted her to say: "I thought it was the evil one himself."

"Have you heard him then?"

"He will surely play like one who longs for salvation, yet knows it can never be his."

When he heard this he came nearer to her, until he was so close that she could have stroked the lock of hair from his brow if only she had dared. "You are right," he said; "that is true enough. And for me, too, the gates of heaven are locked!" And covering his face with his hands he sobbed aloud.

How heartbreaking it was! How gladly she would have given her heart's blood to ease the pain that tortured him. "What is it? What is it?" she asked. "Have you done any wrong? Have you taken anyone's life by accident?"

She stopped short, conscious that this was the very last thing she should have asked.

He uncovered his face and shook his clenched fist. "I am a murderer, I know. For a time I went through that every night; I played the death dance for her, and she danced until she fell down and died. So it is plain enough what I am."

No answer was possible. It was best to let him go on, now he had once begun.

"This last winter I have not played for her, and that is why I have dared to make love to you. I thought it was her wish, but it was not hers, but only my own."

She did not venture to speak as she stretched out her hand to put it on his forehead to calm him, but he started back beyond her reach.

"You ought never to have asked me to play —never—never! Rather have cut through the strings when you heard me begin, for the notes brought everything back to life again." And he broke into a wild and terrible laugh. "I came over as soon as I got your message, and brought the violin with me, for I thought it would comfort you better than I could. But once it had begun, all the past came back again. I saw the great room, full of stamping, breathless couples, and amongst them I saw one dancing so lightly, and with such grace, that she seemed to be a different being from the others. And then I played for her—only for her. And I drove her to her death." And he wrung his hands until every joint and finger cracked. "And to think I could ever forget that! To

think I could escape the pangs of remorse and find happiness; escape, too, from the vow I had taken on her grave! I was surely bewitched, and had forgotten everything until the violin brought it back."

Maia Lisa felt she no longer existed for him. Yet she tried to make one attempt to defend herself and her love.

"Have you quite forgotten me now? I, too, have your vow."

"You only have it because I thought it was her wish. Now I know better. She wishes to have me for herself alone, you see. You must let me go!"

"Dear heart!" she answered, "how can I let you go? I have no one but you. If it were a living woman who claimed you, I might do it, but I cannot see why I should give you up to a dead one."

There must have been something in her tone that touched him. He looked up at her, and the dark, terrible expression died out of his face. He still stood holding his violin and bow, and though he evidently felt them a burden he would not put them on the ground but handed them to Maia Lisa. She took them both in silence, and laid them on a table in the room.

When she came back to the window he seized both her hands and held them pressed against his brow, as though to ask her to feel what wild, hot thoughts were chasing through his brain. Then he began to speak in a tone of infinite sorrow, and with many a pause, indeed, but yet somewhat more like his old self again.

"No, Maia Lisa, you must not think I meant what I said just now. It is not in the least for my own sake that I ask you to let me go. I cannot be so lost to all sense of right as to drag you down into my misery. You have seen now what I am like when I am in the grip of this terrible sorrow of remorse, and you cannot still wish to join your life to mine?"

He stopped, as though to hear her answer, but in her grief and terror she knew not what to say, so he continued: "I know so well what your life is like, and I would desire above all else to stand by your side now your father has gone. But you must consider that the harshness you suffer at your stepmother's hands is nothing in comparison with the misery that awaits you in a union with me. Such remorse sometimes overpowers me that I cannot stay at home, but wander far from the sight of man, for weeks together, in the desolate places of the earth. Sometimes, too, I try to find forgetfulness in the wildest excesses. Alas! alas! you cannot but know, Maia Lisa, that I love you too dearly to drag you down to that. I ought never to have come near you, and I never would have done, had I not thought I was cured!" Again he stopped, but when no answer came he went on again:

"Just now I was almost angry with you, because it was for your sake I had played, and it was playing, that taught me how heavy and dark a fate still hung over me. I wished that I had remained in ignorance, and that I had married you in the belief that all was right.

But that, you must know, was only for a moment, for I love you too dearly—alas! too dearly indeed!—to wish you ever to be my wife."

All the time he was speaking Maia Lisa stood looking down at him. She knew what he said was true, knew he did suffer from such terrible melancholy, that it was quite possible she would be far more unhappy if she married him than if she came once more under her step-mother's rule. Yet she could think of nothing but that she must stand by his side to help him in his need.

"Alas!" she said, "do you not know that I would far rather bear sorrow and misfortune with you than live a life of unmixed joy with anyone else? You shall never leave me if it is true that you love me. How could I . . ."

She stopped, for she saw her words had no effect upon him. "Alas!" she thought, "how shall I make him understand that the greatest misery for me would be not to follow him and help him in his need?"

"All this year," she thought again, "I have been enduring the greatest trouble and anxiety. Surely, I must have learnt something from it? I cannot be any longer such a child as I was when I lost dear Father. I will never complain of my suffering, if only it has taught me how I may keep for my own the man that I love." She lifted her eyes and looked over the orchard, as if seeking someone to help her. And as she looked, she was filled with astonishment at the sight that lay before her. Perhaps she had

had no eyes to notice such things yesterday, or perhaps it had just come to pass in a night. At any rate, she had not seen until now that all her father's apple-trees were in full blossom. It looked like a great roof of pink and white, stretching from the house right away down to the birch grove that sheltered the orchard from the north wind. Every branch was covered with flowers that opened more and more, so it seemed to her, as she looked at them.

How the bees buzzed and hummed amongst the bright, fragrant blossoms. The sun had reached the mountain heights, and his beams gliding over the tree-tops were dancing over the fields, as if impatient to pour over the gay blossoms even more colour and brightness than they already possessed.

As Maia Lisa looked at them, her heart was ready to burst with sympathy. "Poor man, poor man," she thought. "Is it any wonder he is melancholy, when he has never had a home since he was fourteen? How different it would be if he came to Lövdala! What a good home I could offer him here. I know what happy days I have had here until this last year. He should walk as happily under the apple-trees as dear Father did in his time—if only I may take care of him!"

Her cheeks glowed and her eyes shone at the very thought. If she could only talk to him about Lövdala, and make him understand that it was just such a good home as this that he needed.

She was roused from her thoughts by his

dropping her hands, which he had held until then.

"Now give me the violin and let me go," he said. "I see you feel that I have no choice in the matter."

She could not wonder that he thought she was willing to let him go. For there she stood, looking for the right words to keep him and not able to find them. "Dear heart," she said very hurriedly, "stay a little longer. Will you not look round Lövdala a little? Are not the apple-blossoms lovely? See how the golden sunshine falls over the grass. Would you not like——?" But there she stopped. Words failed her. She had wanted to speak of the beautiful home that they two would build together here in Lövdala, but she felt that he set no value on it. His idea of a beautiful home was something very different from hers.

Once more he asked for the violin. Then, he said, he would never cross her path again. She pressed her hand to her heart with a heavy sigh. So now he was going, never to cross her path again! And she could not find words to move him. She could not keep him by her side. She saw nothing for it but to obey him, so she left the window to fetch what he wanted. But when Maia Lisa had picked up the violin she stood still for a moment, her mind filled with new and wonderful thoughts. Here, in her hand, she was holding what had the greatest power over him. This violin had been his strength and comfort in bygone days. She understood—at last she understood. That

violin and the music he played upon it were to Sven Liliecrona what Lövdala was to her. Music and music alone was his home, his place of rest. Here only could he find comfort and refreshment. When he played, the tones of his music made a refuge for him brighter than any apple-blossom, than any sunshine even. Then he entered into his true home, a home that had been his refuge through all the years of his lonely life.

In days gone by he had lived through hard days, undismayed because he had his violin, and it had only needed one stroke of his bow to open the door of the world where he was happy. But now he had fallen a prey to melancholy, because for the last few years he had not been able to play, because he had been shut out from his home. Alas, how miserable she would feel if she were driven from Lövdala. How she would pine, away from her own home! And that, of course, was how he felt. He could not settle down, he did not know where to turn for rest and comfort. Maia Lisa felt suddenly reassured. Now she had discovered his sickness, she knew the remedy as well. If she could but open the door of his real home for him once more he would be himself again, and conquer the ill that now possessed him. She stepped up to the window, but kept the violin in her hand.

"Dear friend," she said, "let me beg for one thing only before you go. Take your violin and play once more. I am certain it was so hard for you just now because it

was the first time since that unhappy night. And I cannot think that it will always be like that. Will you not try just once more, that I may hear you properly? I am sure you will conquer yourself and play for my sake. Why, you said but just now that you had been free of this melancholy all the winter, and thought you were cured. And perhaps you are. You must not think the evil has come back for good. You would see, if you would only dare to play once again, that . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is impossible," he replied. "It would only be ten times worse."

But she persisted. "You will never have to do anything for me again," she urged. "Surely you will not refuse this one thing when we are going to part. If you go away without playing, you will be sorry afterwards that you said 'No' to my very last request."

He did not look any more confident, yet he yielded. "I know how it will end," he said, "and so do you. Still, I will not refuse you."

Maia Lisa passed her hand lightly over the violin, whispering, as she handed it to him: "Dear thing, help me, oh help me now!"

As Liliecrona took it, the dark cloud of misery passed across his face, and when he drew his bow across the strings, the notes sounded as wild and discordant as before. He looked up at Maia Lisa, as if to reproach her for enticing him into this fresh misery. Her heart beat so that she could scarcely bear it, but she would show no fear. She kept her place by the window,

and forced herself to look down at him with a hopeful smile upon her lips.

And listen! Surely the notes were already less despairing, less unhappy. Light was coming through the clouds, the prison wall was breaking down, and the captive soul was being set free. Up they went in steady flight, but now, alas, down they fell again. What a strife it was, now down in the depths, until it seemed impossible they should ever rise again; then up once more, rising, falling, falling, rising! But then, all at once, the melody soared high as if on angels' wings, higher, ever higher in its joy and praise, to the very gates of heaven itself; far above all human voice or thought, up to the home of purest light. And once there, how it tried to express the blessedness revealed.

Suddenly Liliecrona let fall his bow as though he could do no more. His music had carried him up and up, until his strength failed him in sight of such light, such power, such glory. He looked up at Maia Lisa. Great heavy tears filled her eyes as she stood with clasped hands and transfigured face, no longer on earth, but risen with him to heaven. He drew a deep breath—no, she had not gone with him, she had flown up before. His music had never before carried him so high; it was her love alone that had lifted him from the darksome pit. It was indeed true that it would be strong enough to lift him above all life's darkness. He felt it, knew it would conquer all fear, all mistrust.

He drew her hands to his lips and kissed them.

"Have you been in your true home?" she whispered.

"Maia Lisa, dear one, my heart's love! Never once have I played like this before. It was your heart, your love that played, not I. Whether it bring you joy or misery," he went on, "here I must stay. You must help me; you must not let me go."

And how silent it grew in the garden, amidst the apple-trees shedding their blossoms above them like a beauteous bridal veil.

FINIS

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